A Master Guide for Part 'B'

India's VICTORY IN BANGLA DESH

B69

Lt Col A. M. SHAIKH

INDIA'S VICTORY IN BANGLADESH

সৌজন্যে
মঈদুল হাসান
মূলধারা '৭১ গ্রন্থের লেখক
রাশেদুর রহমান
(তারা রহমান)
মুক্তিযুদ্ধগবেষক ও সাংবাদিক

BY

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DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY OF
THOSE WHO FELL
IN THE
LIBERATION OF BANGLADESH

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

"It took only 12 days for the Indian Army to smash its way to Dacca, an achievement reminiscent of the German *Blitzkreig* across France in 1940. The strategy was the same : Speed ferocity and flexibility.

—*Sunday Times*

Bangladesh, most recently East Pakistan and East Bengal before that, is bounded by the five states of the Indian Union : West Bengal in the West, Assam and Meghalaya in the North and North-East and Tripura and Mizoram in the East, while the Bay of Bengal lies in its South.

The most striking geographical features of the land are the low ranges in the Chittagong Hill Tract, the Madhupur Plateau north of Dacca, the few forest areas and the Sunderbans, the delta of the Ganga nearest to the sea. The Chittagong Hill Tract constitutes of the three ranges in the Chittagong district. These run roughly on a North-South axis and reach an altitude of 400 mtrs above sea level. Madhupur Plateau varies in altitude from two to three metres, and is covered by fairly dense forest. The Sunderbans are a tract of channels, tidal creeks, swampy islands and jungles, which run inland to a distance varying between 90 to 120 kilometres.

The country is mainly formed of a vast plain interspersed by three major rivers—the Ganges, (Padma), the Jamuna (Brahmaputra) and the Meghna, and their numerous tributaries. The communications and transportation networks of Bangladesh are affected to a very large degree by its topography. All roads and railways conform to the esturine features of the region and run roughly parallel to each other in the North-South direction. The inland waterways play an important part in transportation and East-West movement other than the riverine transport is difficult.

The country is divided into four major administrative sectors—Khulna, Rajshahi, Dacca, and Chittagong, each of

which is subdivided into various districts for administrative purposes.

The Padma borders in the North-Western region which has the major cities : Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra and Rajshahi. The river, in its North-easterly course from Rajshahi delineates the southern region ; notably Khantia, Jessore, Khulna and Chalna in the Sunderbans.

The Jamuna runs very nearly on a North-South axis. Between its tributary the Brahmaputra and the Surma-Meghna is the important town of Myamensingh.

The Surma-Meghna waters flowing South-West from the Sylhet sector cordon off the eastern part of the country and forms the administrative division of Chittagong with the districts of Comilla, Noakhali, the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

The position of Dacca is nearly at the confluence of these rivers. The rivers swell during the monsoon and become oceanesque in appearance. When the monsoon is abated, the numerous creeks and channels make the country a land of island stretches, and result in severe deterrance to movement, especially cross-country.

Bangladesh is a tropical country, perpetually warm and humid. The monsoon season, *preceded* by thunderstorms in March and April, continues from May until October and is marked by a slight rise in the humidity.

Cyclones are a perennial hazard for the inhabitants of the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal. At times these take a heavy toll in life and property. However, these disturbances tend to dissipate as they travel inland and pose no serious threat to the northern districts.

The plains of Bangladesh are formed by the alluvial deposits, several hundred feet thick, composed of an admixture of silt, clay and various types of fine sand. The soil is fertile and favourable to agriculture. Bangladesh is the single largest supplier of jute in the world. Rice, its other major crop is grown with such phenonmenal success in some places that three

three harvests a year are possible. All types of vegetables, sugarcane, potatoes and oil seeds are grown in abundance.

Bangladesh has been described, owing to the alluvial and aquatic nature of its geography, as a snakes-and-ladders board—all snakes and no ladders, the latter having been knocked off; either by the Mukti Bahini or the retreating Pakistani troops. Even under peacetime conditions, with all the bridges and approach roads intact, the East-West movement of large bodies of men and equipment would be difficult. Movement of the road is hazardous on account of the numerous channels and creeks and also the water-logged fields.

Thus all planning by the Indian High Command for the liberation of Bangladesh was conditioned by the state of bridges and ferries. The Engineers had to toil to keep the ground forces going. Even air-bridging operations, co-operative efforts between the Indian Army and IAF, were expediently adopted to overcome this hurdle. Consequently, the Engineers played a major role in the 'battle of obstacles' as the operations were called by Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora, the GOC-in-C, Eastern Command who was responsible for the conduct of the campaign in Bangladesh.

There is little doubt about the fact tha the Indian Army's performance in Bangladesh was 'spectacular' within a brief period of 12 days it conducted the most decisive liberation campaign in military history, giving a nation of 75 million people its independence in one lightening strike. Operating in one of the most difficult terrains in the world, the Indian forces moving with incredible swiftness, brought a formidable enemy to his knees and took as many as 98,000 prisoners.

The lightening campaign in Bangladesh was a unique military operation in many ways. It evinced the importance of the need for co-operation between the politicians and military commanders, as also between the various services. In the crucial months before the hostilities began, a very high degree of mutual understanding was exhibited by the Indian political leaders and military commanders. The spirit

persisted throughout the campaign and proved to be one of the decisive factors in the eventual outcome—the Liberation of Bangladesh.

The Indian Army's victory in Bangladesh was also a direct result of the lack of political and military sense on the part of Yahya Khan and his political advisors and military commanders. Yahya Khan had placed this army at a strategic disadvantage, and its deployment in the Eastern Theatre was faulty. The tactical advantages offered by the terrain of Bangladesh was not exploited by the Pakistani Generals, while Aurora who had only a marginal superiority over the Pakistani forces, asserted immense initiative, ingenuity and improvisation in the conduct of the operations.

The incredible speed with which the campaign was conducted was truly remarkable and is compared to the German Blitzkreig during the Second World War. The conduct of operations in Bangladesh gave a new dimension to military history because of the improvised dynamic arrangements by the Indian Army, both in tactical and logistical execution. The IAF and IN were greatly responsible for the grand victory, because they assisted in maintaining the mobility of the ground forces by providing adequate and timely support, though in most cases it was neither envisaged nor planned in detail in advance. The Mukti Bahini's enthusiastic support was yet another factor which contributed to the mobility of the operations for they acted as the eyes and ears of the advancing forces. Also with 75 million people on the side of Indian Army it had easy access to all civil and military intelligence, both strategic and tactical before and during the campaign. Intelligence channels, even for long-range intelligence cover, were organised and they provided a steady flow or reliable information from Dacca and other important places in the interior of Bangladesh. Contrarily, as no Bengali would act as an informer for the hated Pakistanis, the Pakistani Army had to obtain whatever information it required on its own.

The Border Security Forces played a vital role in the operations, particularly in the months preceding the campaign The BSF was initially invested with the responsibility of

assisting and supporting members of the liberation forces who escape to the Indian sanctuaries or were operating from the border regions. This task was greatly facilitated by the fact that the BSF and the East Pakistani Rifles (EPR), until recently deployed against each other, were in fairly close contact even before the onset of the crisis. During the early days the BSF rendered yeoman service in the collection and evaluation of intelligence of events in Bangladesh.

The shocking behaviour of the Pakistani Army during Tikka's 'crack down' in Bangldesh—the brutal rapes, organised genocide, mass slaughter, wanton destruction of property and such other atrocities—gave the Indian Army, because of its exemplary conduct, a moral ascendancy over its contestants. The moral disintegration of the Pakistani Army became evident during the campaign, when it met on the field of battle a corps of gentlemen such as the Officers and Jawans of the Indian Army. The comments of Sidney Schanberg, a reporter of the *New York Times*, who accompanied the Indian troops in Bangladesh gives a true and classic perspective of the Indian Army during the brief war:

"I don't like sitting around praising armies. I do not like armies, because armies mean war and I don't like wars. But the Indian Army was something. They were great all the way. There was never a black mark. I lived with the officers and I walked and rode with the Jawans—and they were all great. Sure some of them were scared at first — they wouldn't be human if they weren't. But I never saw a man flinch because he was scared. There is a tremendous spirit in the Indian Army and it did one good to experience it. I have seen our boys in Vietnam and this army was different. Their arms and equipment aren't as good what they had, they used with effect—and they could improvise. I saw recoilless guns carried on jshoulders, big guns pushed across marshes like ox-carts, by tawans. villagers, officers, everybody was in it together. And hey were the most perfect gentlemen, I never saw them do a wrong thing—not even when they saw just how bestial the enemy had been."

The victory in Bangladesh was the Indian "Army's most glorious hour."

LT. COL. A.M. SHAIKH (RETD.)
The Maratha Light Infantry

CHAPTER I

The Genesis of Crisis

"The irony of Pakistan is that in attempting to divide India she divided herself."

—FRANK MORAES

(An eminent Asian journalist)

"Pakistan is a unique country having two wings which differ in all matters except a common religion.....and a common struggle. All the factors like language, tradition, culture, costumes, music, diet, calendar, standard time, that is practically everything, are different."

—ABDUL MANSUR

(A Bengali member of the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1956)

The sovereign independent State of Pakistan came into being at midnight on 14th August, 1947. The primary objective of the constitution of the new nation was to create a territorial identity for the Muslim majority of British India in geographically contiguous areas, by a division of the country. Paradoxically, it were the British and not the Indian Muslims, who promoted the concept of the establishment of a separate Muslim State.

The Hindu Muslim discord is one of the most distinctive features in the annals of the Indian history. The age-old religious conflict was accentuated by cumulative political, economic and social factors during the period of the British rule. The British, after the 'so-called' Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, developed a strong distrust of the Muslims, and began leaning towards the Hindus, The British policy continued until the beginning of the 20th century, when the rising surge of

nationalism made the Hindus 'difficult'. In keeping with their policy of 'divide and rule', the British thereafter switched over to supporting and pampering the Muslims, who were too keen to exhibit their loyalties to the Raj.

The Hindu-Muslim rivalry in old India was intensified by uneven economic development, geographically as well as communally. The sequence of British occupation of India and the distribution of natural resources were the primemovers of this divergency. In addition, the Muslim conservatism and aversion from western education, the inescapable recourse to advancement, prevented them from participating whole-heartedly in the fields of service, trade and industry of the country. Contrarily, the Hindus, who formed the larger denomination of the population and were economically more enterprising, dominated the Administration, and controlled an overwhelming proportion of most professions as well as agrarian and commercial resources. When the Muslims became conscious of their economic backwardness, they attempted to engage in the race for place and profit. However, they found it difficult to measure upto their Hindu counterparts, who had gained firm foothold in these fields. The setback gave rise to a feeling of exploitation among the Muslims by the Hindus, which was aggravated by the innate cultural and ideological differences between the two communities. The British fanned the Hindu-Muslim hatred all along, hoping to enfeeble the forces of nationalism. This eventually led to kindling the flame of the dilectics of 'Two Nation Policy,' by the Muslim leaders, who proceeded to secure a constitutional framework based on absolute parity to the Indian Muslims with their Hindu majority after the British 'departure'.

The Indian National Movement began in 1885 with the organisation of the Indian National Congress. To begin with, the aim of the Congress was to achieve Dominion status for India, but it later gained impetus and began working for complete independence. The Muslim League, a rival party and the bulwark of Muslim interests, came into existence in early 1930's. Although the political aim of the League at its inception was same as that of the Congress, the ways of the two nationalistic blocks invariably ran parallel to each other.

The term 'Pakistan' originally appeared in a scheme outlined by Choudhuri Rahmet Ali, an Indian student of Cambridge University in the year 1930. The scheme propounded the constitution of a separate 'Muslim State', but did not seek to include Bengali or any part thereof in it, though the Choudhuri himself was a Bengali. It was brushed aside by Yusuf Ali, leader of the Indian Muslims, as a student's wilddream-'chimerical and impracticable'. Later that year Sir Mohammed Iqbal, President of the Muslim League, at the Allahabad Session proposed 'the formation of a Consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State'. The proposal, however, was rejected by the Muslim League, albeit not unanimously. However as late as 1935, neither Mr. Jinnah, the legendary helmsman of the League, nor any other Muslim leader of some standing backed the demand for 'Pakistan'—The Land of Purity.

The first official proposal for a Muslim State or States appeared in the Muslim League Resolution adopted at the Lahore Session in 1940. It said—"the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign". Although the Resolution is said to be 'ambiguous', it clearly indicated that the Muslim League intended the establishment of not one 'Pakistan' or one 'Muslim State', but presumably two or three independent states : Pakistan in the North-West, Hyderabad in the South and Bang-i-Islam in the East.

The British, who were bound to ensure the safeguard of the interest of religious minorities in India, used the Muslim League's demands to postpone the transfer of power to the Indians, though the Muslims of British India were not a minority in the true sense. The Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947 (British Government Policy Statement) recognised that the partition of India and that of Punjab and Bengal, the seats of Muslim concentration was inevitable. The Congress opposed the partition in principle, but was unable to bear any more delay in the end of the colonial era. It is suspected that the British were collaborating with the Muslim League, in the hope of delaying their departure from India. The Congress, therefore, accepted the Mountbatten Plan and so did the Muslim League,

which perceived that it was better to have a divided Pakistan than no Pakistan at all. The feelings of the leaders of the Congress were best expressed in a broadcast message by Mr. Nehru on 3 June 1947 :

"For generations we have dreamt and struggled for a free, independent and united India. The proposals to allow certain parts to secede, if they so will, is painful for any of us to contemplate. Nevertheless, I am convinced that our present decision is a right one from the larger view-point."

Thus Pakistan was born under the provisions of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, passed by the British Parliament. The Act incorporated the basic terms of the British Government Policy Statement of 3 June 1947. The new sovereign independent nation, which comprised of two wings, included the following territories :—

(a) **West Pakistan** : West Punjab, the province of Sind, the North-West Frontier Province and British Bluchistan.

(b) **East Pakistan** : East Bengal and the Sylhet district of Assam.

The total area of the State of Pakistan came to 365,529 square miles, about one fifth of the Union of India. According to the Census of 1951, it had a population of some 75,842,000.

However, the Muslim League's aim of establishing Pakistan—the formation of two separate cohesive territorial entities, with Hindu India on one side and Muslim Pakistan on the other—failed in total. The creation of two Pakistans, instead of one, separated by almost 2400 kilometres of the Union of India, underlined the beginning of an untractable conflict within the new nation.

West and East Pakistan differed in the ethnic composition of the inhabitants. The people of West Pakistan consisted of four principle ethnic groups : Punjabis—22.8 millions, Pakhtunis—5 millions , Sindhis—3.9 millions and Baluchis—approximately I million. Each of these has its own language and inhabitates a sizeable geographical region—Punjab, Pakhtunistan,

Sind and Bluchistan, respectively. Contrarily, the most distinguished feature of East Pakistan was the homogenity of its population, 98% of its inhabitants being Bengalis.

Although West Pakistan comprised 85% of the territory of Pakistan, it made up only 46% of the total population. Resultingly, the density of population in West Pakistan was only 138 per square mile, while it was as high as 922 in East Pakistan. The ratio of urban population between West and East Pakistan was roughly 9 : 2, with West Pakistan having 22.5% urban population as against 5.19% of East Pakistan.

The two wings of Pakistan, from the very onset of national life, found the marriage of convenience uncomfortable. Two completely different people were welded together in a geographically incongruous union on the tenuous principle of common religion. The origin of the problem lay in the belief that Islam would bridge the ethnic, cultural and geopraphical gap between the two wings. However, the basic approach to Islam of the West Pakistanis, and the East Begalis is diversant. While the former is characterised by the spirit of Jehad that emanates from Mecca, the latter is marked by the gentler form of Islam in the South-East Asia. Thus, the former is active and the latter passive in the approach to the faith, which is known for its intolerance of religious passivity. No amount of devotion to Islam, therefore, could join the two factions into a firm national union.

The West Pakistanis considered themselves superior to the Bengalis a people with an ancient culture, who are proud of their history and literature, love their language, and value their national traditions. The ethnic attitude of the West Pakistanis was expressed by Mr. Ataur Rehman Khan, a Bengali deputy in the Constitutional Assembly of Pakistan, thus : "The leaders of the Muslim League thought that we were a subject race and they belonged to the race of conquerors."

East Pakistan was an agricultural land, but suffered from chronic deficiency of food stuffs. The rulers of Pakistan failed to remedy the agrarian problem, which was further aggravated by famines, poor harvests and drop in the price of

agricultural raw materials. During the years after the Independence, the poor Bengali farmer became poorer. The disparity between the per capita income in West and East Pakistan were 62% and it went on increasing steadily every year. West Pakistan was given preference while allocating funds as well as opportunities to make use of them for agricultural development.

West Pakistan received a lion's share—almost 77%—of the counrty's development funds. Consequently, industrial enterprises exclusively owned and controlled by West Pakistanis, came up in West Pakistan. These enterprises absorbed 80% of the import meant to foster industrialisation of the country, The location of the capital, first at Karachi and subsequently at Rawalpindi and then Islamabad, went to the advantage of West Pakistan, both in promoting industries and trade. East Pakistan remained a backward agriculture area and became a source of raw materials and foreign currency, and a market for the commodities produced in West Pakistan. The few industries like jute mills, which were set up in East Pakistan, were aimed at exploiting the raw materials to earn foreign currency for the western wing. The handicraft industry of the Eastern wing was destroyed systematically as a result of the competition of industrial goods from West Pakistan.

East Pakistan, because of the agricultural raw materials for export, showed a large favourable trade balance, which was used to offset the deficit balance in West Pakistan. The Western wing, which contributed only 25% of the exports, utilised roughly 70% of the total imports of Pakistan.

The West Pakistani traders exploited the shortage of industrial goods and food stuffs in East Pakistan. The price index in the eastern wing remained invariably higher than that of the West. For example, the price of rice, the staple food for the Bengalis, was four times higher in East Pakistan than in its western wing.

The rates of taxes and duties collected from the eastern wing were invariably higher and West Pakistan appropriated to

itself even that part of the tax revenue, which was formerly allocated to the eastern wing.

The continued discrimination against the Bengalis in the matter of initial appointments and promotions to key posts led to a very small promotion of Bengalis in the important national services. The West Pakistanis claimed as many as 94% of the Civil Services. 85% of the foreign service and 95% of the armed forces. The eastern wing was similarly excluded from the benefits of participation in the services in agriculture, industry, education, health and welfare. Discrimination against Bengalis occurred even in private enterprises owned by the West Pakistanis. The employees from the western wing usually received two or three times higher salary than their Bengali colleagues.

The declaration of Urdu as the only State language proved to be a continuous cause of resentment among the population of East Pakistan. Their demands for the recognition of Bengali as one of the State languages were not paid heed to by the Central Government, which was dominated by the western wing.

Ever since the formation of Pakistan as an independent State, one of the most difficult problems faced by the Pakistani leaders had been that of a constitutional formula, acceptable to the different geographical regions, and ethnic and linguistic groups of Pakistan. Of the constitutional problems, the most intricate had been that of the nature of the federation and the relationship of the constituent provinces with the Central Government of Pakistan.

The first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was set up by the announcements of 22 July and 10 August. 1947, by Lord Mountbatten, the last Governor General of British India. But for seven long years the Constituent Assembly was unable to make any headway in the field of Constitution making. While the new Constitution for the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India was promulgated as early as 26 January 1950, Pakistan continued to be governed by the constitutional laws of the British Parliament. The draft of a Constitution for Pakistan

was finally approved in 1952, but it evoked strong protests from the people particularly in East Pakistan fo. the following reasons :

(a) In the distribution of seats in the Central Legislature the Punjabis were given an advantage over the other ethnic groups, especially over the Bengalis.

(b) Urdu was given the sole State language.

Although the draft Constitution was passed by the Constituent Assembly in April 1953, it was followed by a proposal to redistribute the seats in a Central Legislature. Eventually, the Constituent Assembly approved the modified draft Constitution in November 1953.

In the meanwhile, the Muslim League in Pakistan became discredited especially in the eastern wing, because of its failure to meet squarely the demand for an autonomous East Pakistan, official status for Bengali language and parity between the two wings in the allocation of resources. The general situation in the country deteriorated and democratic movement began striking roots everywhere, and more precipitately in East Pakistan, where the demand for an autonomous status became a popular slogan. The hitherto unquestioned authority of the Muslim League was completely undermined and a number of political parties, liberal and democratic in principles, came up against it. Realising the precariousness of their party's position, the leaders of the League resorted to repressive measures against the opposition parties and the East Bengal National Movement which stood for 'Bengal for Bengalis'. As a result, in March 1956 it met with a crushing defeat at the hands of the United Front in East Pakistan.

As a consequence of the turbulent political undercurrents in the country, a military plea took place in Pakistan in October 1958 and General Mohammed Ayub Khan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, emerged as the Chief Administrator of the Martial Law. He also secured for himself the office of the Prime Minister, and also the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry for Kashmir Affairs. Soon afterwards, Ayub

became the President of Pakistan by eliminating the remaining opposition. He then proclaimed his own concept of 'basic democracies' and also a new Constitution. So vast became the powers of the President that the new Government of Pakistan came to be known as "a government of the President by the President and for the President". The new Constitution not only belied the autonomous urges of East Pakistan, but also shattered all her hopes for the installation of a National Assembly based on direct elections and universal adult suffer-age. Although Ayub won a comfortable victory in the general elections of 1962, sporadic anti-Ayub agitations errupted in the eastern wing, which the military dictatory endeavoured to stifle, but in vain.

The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, which resulted in further politico-economic retardation of Pakistan, gave a tremendous boost to the movement for autonomy in the eastern wing. In March 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, who had risen as the revered head of the Awami League, which spearheaded the movement for provincial autonomy, announced his Six-point Programme, which entailed the following :

(a) Constitutional provision for a federated Pakistan on the basis of the Lahore Resolution and for a Parliamentary form of Government recognising the supremacy of a duly elected Legislature based on universal adult franchise.

(b) The dealing by the Federal Government with only two subjects—defence and foreign affairs—with all other subjects vested in the federating states.

(c) Prevention of interwing flight of capital by the provision of wo separate, freely convertible currencies for the two wings or one currency with two separate Reserve Banks.

(d) Investiture of the power of taxation and revenue collection in the federating units with the Central Government receiving an optamum portion of it for meeting its financial obligations.

(e) A series of economic, fiscal and legal reforms to

eliminate economic disparities between the two wings.

f) Creation of a militia or para-military force for the defence of East Pakistan.

The formula obviously aimed at securing control of the country from the Central Government, which in the event of realisation of the programme, would become dependent on the federating units. It also threatened the existing dictation of the western wing in the country's affairs and deprived the armed forces' financial freedom and security. Therefore, the demands enunciated by the Awami League were totally unacceptable to the 'militarocrats' who were predominatly from West Pakistan.

In the meanwhile, Ayub, exercising his dictatorial prerogative, had been taking the majority of policy decision on his own rather than in consultation with the politicians or the armed forces, antagonising both these pillars of power. Also, despite his earlier pronouncements to relinquish power, he undertook more stringent measures to maintain it. To make matters worse, in keeping with the old dictum—"power breeds corruption"—mass-scale corruption flourished against a background of growing administrative chaos in the country, which resulted in intense discontent among the masses. Eventually the mounting popular turmoil led to the downfall of Ayub in 1969, and General Yahya Khan came to the helm of affairs in Pakistan.

Yahya's aim was to substantiate the absolute power of the military junta by reinforcing it with the respectability of democratic approval. His regime. therefore, was marked from that of Ayub's by two salient differences the military due to its active role in Yahya's promotion, resumed martial administration of civil affairs, which were hitherto managed civilly, and Yahya, profiting from the experience of his predecessor, made policy decisions on the advice of his military and political colleagues. However, from his seat of power he failed to appreciate the prevailing strength of democratic aspirations, particularly in East Pakistan. Assuming that none of the opportunistic political parties of Pakistan would be able to

muster sufficient votes to form a majority government, he announced a specially designed framework for the general elections to be held in 1970—a step which was to earn him a place in history as the architect of the disintegration of Pakistan.

Yahya's naive 'one-man-one-vote' formula accorded unprecedented power to the 75 millions of East Pakistan. When the election was eventually held in December 1970, the results contrary to Yahya's expectations, were startingly decisive. Of the contested seats in the National Assembly, the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman won 167 seats, while a combined total of 146 was claimed by other ten political parties—Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party with 88 seats constituting the only other solid voting block. Similarly, of the 310 contested seats in the Eastern Provincial Assembly Awami League polled 298. This was the beginning of a political nightmare for Yahya, for the outcome of the election meant unchallengeable dominion of the eastern wing in the National Assembly and also the realisation of the Six-point Programme, which was totally unacceptable to the military junta—for it spelt the end of the military rule in Pakistan.

Pressure was immediately brought to bear on Mujib to dilute his demands, which but made him adamant, and he proclaimed that there would be no compromise in either letter or spirit of his programme. As the tension mounted, Bhutto grabbed the opportunity to announce his party's intention of boycotting the upcoming Assembly by setting the western wing, where his party had a popular base, ablaze with riots. Yahya used these cyclonic political developments as a pretext to postpone the Assembly and, unaware of his lack of political acumen proceeded to assume the role of Abraham Lincoln of Pakistan. He frantically endeavoured to resolve the deadlock between the political leaders of the two wings but without tangible results. By the middle of February; the situation reached a point of no return, as the attitudes of the leaders of both sides stiffened further, regardless of consequences to the integrity of Pakistan. The political situation in the eastern wing deteriorated rapidly and following Yahya's postponement of the Assembly indefinitely on 1 March, Mujib became the de facto ruler in

East Pakistan, The Bengalis took the breach of faith as a Supreme act of treachery, and the radio and other government machinery in the eastern wing started functioning in open defiance of the central authority. The Bengalis would not trust the West Pakistanis again and the eastern wing reverberated with the sentiment of independence from the 'neo colonial' rule. Despite Mujib's appeal for a non-violent, non-co-operation movement, province-wide agitations broke out. When General Tikka Khan, who had earlier earned the sobriquet of the 'Butcher of Baluchistan', arrived in Dacca as the newly appointed Martial Law Administrator, he found the province paralysed with the onrush of th non-co-operation movement which was turning 'rebellious'.

In the meanwhile, Yahya, anticipating the reaction in the eastern wing, had set in motion the Pakistani military machine, which was anxious to thwart the implementation of the election results. On 21 February, he dissolved his civilian cabinet, and took steps to build up the military strength in East Pakistan by interwing transfers of troops. However, aware of the inadequacy of military forces in the eastern wing for an immediate military suppression of the Bengali 'uprising', he was compelled to stall for time before the final 'crackdown'. On 6 March, he addressed the nation on radio announcing the new date for the Assembly opening—25 March. He also went on entreat the Awami League by a convincing appearance of sincere negotiations. He then arrived in Dacca alongwith Bhutto in the middle of March, but the three leaders failed to reach agreement. Finally, under growing pressure from the military junta and Bhutto to stampout the escalating Bengali defiance, he flew out of Dacca on the midnight of 25 March, instructing Tikka Khan to "fully restore the authority of his Government".

By now the military build-up in the east was adequate for the task set before it : to eliminate or terrorize the dissidents by massive brutal force, Tikka quickly embarked upon the grisly task of mass slaughter, utter destruction, organised looting and rape. The Bengalis put up a gallant resistance and the Bangladesh Liberation Force, which eventually came to be

known as Mukti Bahini, came into being. As the situation worsened, more and more Pakistani forces were flown in from the western wing via Sri Lanka – Pakistani flights over the Indian territory were forbidden—till the Pakistan Army strength reached 4⅓ infantry divisions and more than 25,000 other military and para-military forces.

The result of the West Pakistani atrocities was the pouring in of millions of refugees, particularly Hindus and supporters of the Awami League, over the border into India. Yahya tried to scale down the magnitude of the exodus by trying to convince the United Nations that he had restored law and order in East Pakistan and that only a few disgruntled leaders had moved out to India. He also alleged that India was instigating and supporting the rebels. The world, at this stage, opined that the struggle between the two wings of Pakistan was the country's internal affairs and, therefore, decided to refrain from any interference.

Yahya's political and diplomatic manoevouring but revealed his ignorance of the Napoleonic maxim : "There are only two powers in the world, the spirit and the sword. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit". The ingress of millions of refugees and false accusations by Pakistan shook her neighbour India, the sleeping giant, to wakefulness—an event which was to lead to a unique landmark in the human history : The Liberation of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER II

The Compulsory Escalation

"In ten days I might not be here in Rawalpindi.....(but) off fighting a war."

—PRESIDENT YAHYA KHAN

(A boastful utterance on 25 November 1971 before a high-powered Chinese delegation.)

"I earnestly desire peace.....I will be the last person to start a war. But if war is thrust upon us, we are prepared to fight in defence of our freedom and our ideals."

—PRIME MINISTER MRS. INDIRA GANDHI

(A public address in Calcutta on 3 December 1971)

According to Clausewitz "War is not an act performed by military men along but an expression of the conflict of ideas, objects and the way of life of an entire society with those of another society." Thus when a conflict between two nations or societies reaches a stage when no solution is feasible through diplomatic, political or other means, it more often than not leads to the use of violence to achieve the desired objective.

No nation can be called truly great unless it cherishes its internal values and, is strong enough to protect them, if need be. The internal values which have lent lustre to the Indian Union are two fold in character : firstly, to achive and maintain a sense of national integration based on secularism, and secondly, to preserve the democratic character of her political infrastructure. To this end, India has set herself five clear goals :

firstly, to promote a socialistic welfare state within parliamentary democracy with rule of law ; secondly, to foster unification and integration of the nation ; thirdly, to generate rapid industrial and economic development towards reasonable standards of living for the common man ; fourthly, to maintain the security of the Union's land, air and sea spaces ; and fifthly, to promote international peace, amity and the welfare of mankind so as to establish her rightful place in the world.

Pakistan campaign of deliberate extermination in East Pakistan and the unabated influx of refugees resulted in a direct threat to the internal values and policies of the Indian Union. The pressure of millions of refugees, whose eviction was a preplanned act of demographic aggression on the part of Pakistan, confronted India with problems of unprecedented character and intensity : the economic burden caused by the need to maintain the refugees on humanitarian grounds became unbearable, in West Bengal and Tripura States, where accentuated social disparities had actuated the danger of revolutionary strife, matters were driven to the point of explosion, and lastly tremendous diabolic potential was created for nation-wide discruption of communal disharmony and the resultants riots. Thus, to sum up, Tikka's crackdown in East Pakistan eventuated an imminent threat to the National Security of the Indian Union.

Walter Lippman has defined national security in the following words : "A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war." Thus the aim of nationnal security is to protect internal values, primarily by political and domestic endeavour, but if necessary by deterrence the threat of force or, in the extreme, by the use of force.

It is, therefore, imperative to fathom the depths of the past and prevailing social and political environment, the geopolitical catalysts, the international compulsions and the national expediency to get a clear view of the fateful consequences that followed the repressive campaign launched by Pakistan in its eastern wing.

From the very inception of the new states of India and Pakistan the relations between the two countries were marked by ever growing signs of antagonism. Howbeit the realisation that India was much bigger and stronger territorially, economically and militarily—Pakistan chose to assume the role of political and military competitor with India. However, her comparatively diminutive size, political instability and paucity of economic resources rendered her far too weak leaving a singular course for the attainment of the much longed for parity—borrowing power from outside benefactors. Therefore, Pakistan religiously followed Chanakaya's axiom— "When a a king finds himself unable to confront his enemies single handed, then he should make the expedition in combination with other kings." But in doing so, she ignored what Mao Tse-tung had to say on the subject, which, more or less is an exposition of the finer points of Chanakya's diplomacy. "In this world" Mao propound, "friendship exist between one cat and another, not between a cat and a rat." Resultingly, when Pakistan sought powerful friends, she actually ran into puppeteers—world powers desirous of drawing her into their politico-economic or as an instrument to meet their own ends.

While Pakistan, in her quest for power and prosperity, chose to align herself with the Western block by joining pacts like CENTO and SEATO, India opted for a policy of non-alignment. Following the breach of friendly relations between India and China in 1962, Pakistan quickly grabbed the opportunity for closer connections with the latter. The policy of Pakistan Government was based on confrontation with India and the armed conflagration in 1947-48 and 1965 but poured oil over the troubled waters, because unfortunately for India, Pakistan foreign policy also afforded the major powers of the world the scope to influence and interfere with the mutual relations of the two countries. In addition, Pakistan further widened the gap by providing sanctuaries, training, and arms aid to the Naga and Mizo insurgent, inciting the rebellious elements like Naxalites and also the minorities, thus attempting to create unrest and disunity in the Indian sub-continent.

Consequently, when towards the end of March 1971 the news of revolt and defiance in East Pakistan and the subsequent repressive measures adopted by Tikka reached India, the Bengali National Movement struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the Indian masses. Foreign correspondents who had eye-witnessed the 'rape of East Bengal and were shunted out from Dacca as a part of the crackdown, poured out the stories of merciless genocide, mass rape, wanton looting and destruction. The rising to tide of passion in the country egged the militant opposition clamour for immediate intervention in support of the movement in East Bengal. Within six days of the outbreak of the revolt. Mr. K. Subrahmanyam, Director of the Indian Instiute for Defence Studies and Analysis, aired his views on the vital subjects : "What India must realise is the fact that the breakup of Pakistan is in our own interest." His opinion was echoed by many a Minister of the Union Cabinet and retired senior General.

However, the problems which confronted Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, at this stage were comlpicated and she very prudently saw that war, being a serious business, could not be waged at the dictates of popular demand, and her military advisors fell in with her line of thinking. Firstly a valid excuse, if not a substantial reason was essential to justify a military intervention in the eyes of the world. Little did the supporters of armed action realise that a premature step by India would have meant interference in the internal affairs of a neighbouring country, contrary to the United Nations Charter and the bilateral agreement concluded at Tashkent in 1966 pledging absention from such action. Secondly, there was the urgent need to strengthen the military machine to ensure a victory, for the lessons of the debacle of 1962 were not easy to forget. The militant political faction in the country, however, failed to appreciate the requirement of the high degree of military preparedness which could not be attained without adequate time. Therefore, Mrs. Gandhi, aided by her advisors, proceeded to orchestrate the three cardinal aspects of national policy and security—political, economic and military—in perfect accord.

On the 31st March, the Prime Minister reacted to the crackdown in East Bengal by personally moving a resolution in Lok Sabha demanding "immediate cessation of the use of force and the massacre of the defenceless people of the province". She proclaimed : "The tragedy which has overtaken our valiant neighbour in East Bengal so soon after their rejoicing over their electoral victory has united us in grief for their suffering, concern for the wanton destruction of their beautiful land, and anxiety for their future."

In the meantime, hard hit by the brute force of ruthless military dictatorship, a terrorised mass of humanity kept pouring over the border into India—the number rising to 60,000 a day. It was estimated, and not without sufficient reason, that by the end of October the figure would reach to about 10 million. Massive socio-emotional repercussion apart, financial experts calculated that at the prevailing rate of inflow expenditure on the upkeep of the refugees would mount to Rs. 4,500 million. The aggressive political elements propagated that it would be more economical to fight a war and to put an end to the refugee problem than bear this burden, which had led to additional taxes and a corresponding rise in the price index in the country. K. Subrahmanyam's earlier views gained currency as the "opportunity of the century." The result was a strong admonition to Pakistan by Mrs. Gandhi : "The Government of India holds Pakistan fully responsible for creating such conditions forthwith as would facilitate the return of these refugees."

By now despite the courage and resolution of the people of East Bengal, Tikka's inhuman crackdown had broken them to such an extent that they could act only in humble submission. Yahya jumped on this opportunity by presenting to the world a phoney picture of normally in the province. He also outlawed the Awami League and arrested Mujib, whose fate was unknowable. Many other Awami League leaders had either been arrested or eliminated earlier. A few went underground in East Bengal and were now in the stranglehold of the Pakistani Army. Of the remainder few, most followed the refugee trail to seek shelter in India. This mass disappearance of the yeoman of Awami Leage resulted in a sudden void in its

leadership. The forebearers of the Bengali cause, who had entered India, formed a provisional government in exile on 17 April 1971. Mujib was appointed its President in absentia, and Tajuddin Ahmed was nominated Prime Minister to carry out the functions of the government. The seat of the government was named Mujib Nagar, and a radio station was installed to project the voice of freedom towards those who had stayed behind to organise Mukti Bahini. India at this crucial juncture, decided to provide all support to the provincial government to continue the struggle for the liberationof the people of East Bengal from the oppression of the Pakistani Army. Yahya quickly scored a point over Mrs. Gandhi by accusing India of meddling with what he reiterated as "the internal affair of Pakistan".

In an attempt to explain to the world of the predicament India was pushed into, on 24 May 1972, Mrs. Indira Gandhi said....."so massive a migration in so short a time is unprecedented in history. Three and a half million have come in last eight weeks. On the present estimates, the cost of relief may exceed Rs. 1,000 million for six months." She further added : "It is mischievous to suggest that India had anything to do with what happened in Bangladesh. This is an insult to the aspirations and spontaneous sacrifices of the people of Bangladesh and a calculated attempt by the rulers of Pakistan to make India a scapegoat for their own misdeeds. It is also a crude attempt to deceive the world community."

She then appealed repeatedly to the big powers and other democratic countries to ask the military dictators of Pakistan to stop committing atrocities in East Bengal and keep their population within their borders. "Otherwise", she warned "what began as an internal affair of Pakistan was gradually turning into an internal affair of India, and would soon be turning into an international issue." As a result, diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan took a turn for the worse and eventually broke up altogether.

Simultaneously pressure, started building up in India, especially in the eastern parts, in favour of India's official recognition of the Bangladesh Government and Bangladesh as a

sovereign indepedent, political entity. Influential leadears like Jayaprakash Narayan and many others derided Mrs. Gandhi for her "weakness and hesitancy". The Prime Minister, however, firmly and categorically asserted ; "Not yet ! At the appropriate moment "The exactitude of her decision was obvious, though it failed to pacify the prevailing sentiment in the country. An official recognition of Bangladesh at this stage would have convinced the world of Yahya's distortive version of the role India had been playing in support of the Bengali aspirations. Also it would have probably precipitated an armed confrontation between India and Pakistan, with unpredictable international reaction.

Mrs. Gandhi, using all her political and diplomatic shrewdness. continued to trade for time, in an endeavour to tilt the world opinion in favour of India. She propagated that the refugee was not an internal problem of India and Pakistan alone, but an international affair involving human considerations. Efforts were made to procure financial assistance from world power to maintain the refugees, making them "a responsibility of the world communtty." A "house to house drive" was organised in the country for collection of funds to ease the economic burden to which people reacted with unparalleled spontaneity and generosity.

On 6 July, Jayaprakash Narayan once again added his weighty voice to the opposition parties' demand for armed intervention. He declared..... "the country, the Government and the people are unworthy if these are not prepared for war." However, the monsoon had just set in, making major military operations against either wing of Pakistan hazardous, if not impossible, at this time. Therefore, the Mukti Bahini, after its initial setbacks was now organised on a firmer footing by setting up several camps for equipping and training the forces properly. Its important aspects like command and control, planning and co-ordination were given proper attention to. The force was set in motion to facilitate an Indian Army's drive into Bangladesh in case of a conting ency.

By now the world opinion was showing a considerable change and the refugee problem was no longer considered a "psychological hoax." A United Nation's mission visited India to assess the situation at first hand. "I was depressed," Charles Mace, the leader of the mission stated, "to see the situation in which the refugees were coming over to India which despite her difficulties had taken care of the refugees well" Mrs. Gandhi's point that the "cruel tragedy" in East Pakistan was damaging India—economically, socially and emotionally—was at last driven home, and she now pronounced that any economic or military aid to Pakistan by a foreign power would be used against the people of Bangladesh. Her remarks were endorsed by Senator Edward Kennedy, who visited the refugee camps, saying that the military hardware supplied to Pakistan by the United States was alleviating the sufferings of the people of Bangladesh.

This was followed by a gradual and definite change to militant tone in the speeches of Mrs. Gandhi. She made it known to Yahya, in no uncertain terms, that unlike in the past India would not suffer the burden of deliberate expulsion of such a large number of people by Pakistan without demanding the compensation for it. She rebutted Yahya's allegations of Indian interference in Pakistan's internal affairs and affirmed India's right to retaliate, adding that she would not be deterred by threats. She blasted Yahya's claims that normalcy had returned in East Pakistan and challenged : "If that is so, Pakistan should immediately call back the refugees."

Throughout this period, the flow of refugees into India continued without respite, further burdening the country's sagging economy and inflaming popular passion. By this time, it had become apparent to Yahya that the two wings of Pakistan could not be kept together by using force, but he refused to acknowledge and accept it. As a result, he found himself in an extremely difficult political situation of his own creation. By using brutal force, he had antagonised the people of East Pakistan to such a high degree, that a reconciliation at this stage was a political "impossibility".

In deference to international pressure and the changing tone of Mrs. Gandhi, Yahya now offered to take back the refugees, but under certain conditions : Only the bonafide Pakistani citizens could return but not the unemployed and homeless in West Bengal, whom the Indian Government had "deliberately" categorised as "refugees". He asserted that the genuine refugees from West Pakistan were only 2 million, leaving the remaining 8 million as India's responsibility.

On the political side in Pakistan, he promised to call the National Assembly in due course—a pretence since most of the elected members of East Pakistan had either been killed, arrested or driven into India. A puppet had been appointed as Prime Minister in Islamabad and another the Governor of East Pakistan. However, the actual power in the eastern wing, was still in the hands of Tikka Khan as the Martial Law Administrator.

The Pakistan stipulations for the return of the refugees were unacceptable to India for she stood for democracy. Mrs. Gandhi pronounced that the prerequisite for their return was the creation of a favourable political atmosphere which meant handing over the power to Mujib and the Awami League, the duly elected leaders of the people of Bangladesh. The hope of a solution through the Mukti Bahini was at low ebb, for it was apparent that it would take years for such a movement to unloosen the Pakistani stranglehold of East Pakistan. These developments, together with the increased internal pressure, compelled Mrs. Gandhi to contemplate the extreme step of military intervention, if other alternatives failed. The Service Chiefs, accordingly, were given instructions to go ahead with the plan for an offensive in Bangladesh and carry out preparations to meet the contingency.

Although, initially, most foreign governments had reacted favourably to New Delhi's diplomatic approaches, for they sensed that the Indian demands were moderate and justifiable. But when India echoed the voice of the Bangladesh Government in exile, propagating that nothing less than complete independence would do, these governments reversed their earlier conciliatory attitude,

The international pressure increased as India's intention to go to war took a more definite form and eventually became ineffective. Yahya exploited the changing international mood, repeating his earlier offer, which on the surface, seemed to meet India's demands. He was sure of the United State backing, which became evident when Mr. Henry Kissinger visited Islamabad and later went secretly to Peking. These developments which revealed close understanding between President Nixon and Yahya, further reinforced Yahya's militant mood. He declared : "If India made any attempt to seize any part of East Pakistan, it would be treated as an attack on Pakistan ....I shall declare war, let the world note." In reply to this threat of war, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Swaran Singh pointed out : "Pakistan had been all along trying to mislead world opinion by asserting that Pakistan's problem is with India and not with the people of Bangladesh". He said that unless Pakistan came to terms with the people of Bangladesh, the Mukti Bahini activities would not wane, and that if Pakistan used it as an excuse to launch an attack on India—"we would defend ourselves."

After the United States alienation of India, the government was left with no alternative but to seek friendship elsewhere. Following a series of visits between Mr. D.P. Dhar and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, on 9 August 1971, and Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed which brought a fresh whisp of air to the tension laden atmosphere in the country. The treaty was markedly significant, because it strengthened India's military stature immeasureably ; firstly, it provided for consultation between the two countries in case of war or threat of war to either of them, with a view of removing the threat ; secondly, it took care of the Chinese intervention in the event of hostilities between India and Pakistan and ensured better procurement of the much needed military hardware.

Emboldened, Mrs. Gandhi pronounced on the Independence Day—"We do not want war. We do not rattle sabres. But India is prepared for any emergency." The warning meant business, because the monsoon was clearing up and the campaign season was nearing. The tension on the border began

mounting and Yahya reacted violently—"Let me warn you and the world that this means war, total war, which I hate. But I will not hesitate for the defence of my country."

For international consumption, on 18 September, Yahya made a semblance of handing over the civil administration of Pakistan to the duly elected members of the people. This, however, failed to mitigate the internal disorder, for he also announced the intensions to amend the new Constitution retaining his right to veto the amendments. This Constitution was to be presented to the National Assembly, when it met after by-elections to fill the seats of the Awami Lea gue members, whom he had disqualified earlier. The date for these elections were set between 25 November and 9 December. However, this deliberate attempt to delay the transfer of power was unacceptable to Bhutto, whose political stature was unquestionable, and he immediately warned Yahya that "Chaos would result from a delay in the power-transfer." To crown his follies, Yahya also announced a secret trial of Mujib for "treason against the State" and warned against speculation, which would "but jeopardirse the case." The trial provoked serious reactions in India, the anti-West Pakistani sentiment of the refugees reached its apex and the world opinion awoke to the "realities" of Yahya's game. India and Pakistan, spurred by the political blundering of Yahya, began moving slowly to the brink of an armed confrontation. Yahya's preposterous actions made it necessary in September to take precautionary measures to counter Pakistani thrusts into sensitive Indian territory. Troops movement began towards the international border for deployment along the likely avenues of Pakistani ingress. Since Pakistan enjoyed the advantage of having cantonments close to the border, which could enable rapid mobilisation, such a step was essential from the point of view of military strategy.

On the Pakistani side, Yahya completed the deployment of his troops in West Pakistan by about 12 October, while the Indian formations were still on the move. By the third week of October, the Indian mobilisation was completed. In the meanwhile, Yahya accused India of 'provocations' with the aim of sparking off a shooting war. Pakistan thus attempted

to emerge as the aggrieved party, while pointing India as a monster who wanted to cow a weaker neighbour with threats of war.

Mrs. Gandhi, on the other hand, despite the assurance of military security. embarked on a final endeavour to entreat the world power to persuade Yahya "to see reason" and arrange for a return of the refugees. She first went to Moscow and voiced India's concern at the events in East Pakistan. "We can not but be perturbed when a fire breaks out in a neighbour's house. What happened in East Bengal can no longer be regarded as Pakistan's domestic affair. More than 9 million East Bengalis have come into our country. We can not be expected to absorb them. We have problems enough of our own, and we certainly do not need to add to our vast population." On her return to Delhi, she expressed her exaspiration over the United States policy while talking to a foreign correspondent : "Everybody admires our restraint. We get verbal praise, but the others are not restrained, and they get arms, as well."

On 23 October, the Prime Minister proceeded on a three-week tour to several western countries including the United States, France, West Germany, Britain, Belgium and Australia. There, she mainly appealed for aid for the refugees and emphasised the need for their early return. She also advocated that pressure should be brought to bear on Pakistan for an immediate political settlement in East Pakistan. She expressed her willingness to meet Yahya, to settle the differences between the two countries, but also asserted that any settlement in East Pakistan must be made with its people and their elected leaders which spelt the immediate release of Mujib, then in captivity. But Yahya was not in a mood to negotiate with a rebel. In Paris Mrs. Gandhi reiterated her offer to meet Yahya and commented—"How can you shake hands with a clenched fist ?' She assured the world that India would not assume the role of aggressor, and expressed her fear that she might be pushed into a war by compulsion. She was able to a great extent to apprise the world of realities and consequences of the refugee problem and succeeded in winning sympathy for the

cause of the people of East Bengal and India's interest in a just solution for their aspirations.

Although the United States Administration assured Yahya of full support in the event of a war with India, in practice it maintained only a flexible response to the fluctuating situation, keeping its options open to back any individual or party which gained the upper hand. It supported Yahya when he was winning and conveniently gave him a cold shoulder when he managed to get himself in trouble. Also, the public opinion in the United States protested against Tikka's brutal methods of repression and ruthless genocide.

The uncertainty of the United States support became apparent to Yahya, who thereafter counted heavily on China's help. From the Indo-Chinese showdown in 1962, Peking's foreign policy had always tilted towards Pakistan. The relations between the two countries were greatly coglomerated in the succeeding years. On 13 April 1974, Chou-en-lai had promised to help Pakistan in maintaining its "territorial integrity" against all "external interference" and the handful of people, in the eastern wing. In an interview with Columbia Broadcasting system on 9 Novemder 1971, Yahya said, "The Chinese would intervene if India attacked Pakistan". Bhutto who led a Pakistani delegation to Peking in Novembr 1971, to seek a defence pact with China as a counter to the Indo-Soviet Treaty, told the press : "China will give any measure of support we need. It depends what we ask." He further elucidated "China is fully and enthusiastically supporting Pakistan. We can expect the maximum assistance.....India should have no illusions on this."

As mentioned earlier, to offset the international recriminations of the repressive measures in East Pakistan Yahya, in August 1971, had replaced Tikka Khan by Dr. A.M. Malik a retired East Pakistani civil servant as Governor, thus giving the impression that civil authority has been restored. Lt. Gen. Niazi, later succeeded Tikka Khan as the Martial Law Administrator and Commander of Pakistani Eastern Army command. The removal of Tikka Khan, at this important juncture, was a grave mistake on the part of Yahya. The situation in East

Pakistan was too complex and out of the usual run for a conventional soldier. The post Niazi held required a man capable of thinking for himself and taking shrewd quick decisions at the moment of crisis. It also entailed independent execution of these decisions without guidance or supervision by higher authorities. It was unfortunate for Yahya that by appointing Niazi in place of Tikka Khan, he put a square peg in a round hole.

During September/October the rebel activities increased progressively along the border as well as in the interior of East Pakistan. Large scale sabotage, attacks on police stations and other centres of government authority and killing of collabrators by the Mukti Bahini instilled fear among the population and created a sense of insecurity. Niazi was gradually squeezed by the Mukti Bahini and this inflamed the entire border with well planned attacks on Border Out Posts (BOPs) accompanied by efforts to capture important tactical features inside the East Pakistan, which would help India's full-fledged intervention, if and when it came Yahya warned India that if Indian troops attemted to enter East Pakistan this would be considered open war against Pakistan and could meet with massive retaliation.

By now, an armed interevention in East Pakistan had become inevitable for India. The Soviet Russia, despite the Indo-Soviet Treaty, was not in favour of such a drastic action, in the fear of a direct involvement and armed confrontation with the United States. The United States was playing a double game, but was trying to bail out Yahya from the tight spot he had managed to get into. They stood for a policy of peaceful appeasment, which entailed an indefinite postponement of the return of the refugees. India was aware that although China supported Pakistan politically, despite her unpredictable nature, she would not dare to help the latter militarily by an active intervention, in case of an Indo-Pakistan war, because of the Russian threat to her northern border. The decision-making now depended on India alone and when the decision to resort to armed intervention in East Pakistan, an expediency caused by the blundres of Pakistani leaders, was finally taken by Mrs. Gandhi, it came as a surprise to friends and foe alike.

The Mukti Bahini elements operating inside East-Pakistan were now supported by Indian artillery. When they got in trouble the Indian Army and the BSF assisted to extricate them. In the initial stages the use of Indian troops inside East Pakistan was avoided, as this would have been an act of war. But as the intensity of Mukti Bahini operations grew, the decision to cross the border was taken without hesitation. As a result by the time Yahya ultimately decided on an all-out showdown, considerable tactical gains were made, which facilitated operations by the Indian Army later.

In the meanwhile, in the Western Sector the Pakistani Armed Forces had become active. Mrs. Gandhi made a statement on these incidents in Parliament on 24 November..... "it was Pakistan which threatened total war and moved its entire armed strength into operational positions on our borders and launched massive hate—India campaign with the slogn "Crush India". We had, therefore, to take appropriate measures and move our forces to defensive positions in order to protect the integrity of our country and lives and property of our citizens. It has never been our intention to escalate the situation or to start a conflict. To this end we have instructed our troops not to cross the border except in self-defence. We cannot ignore our experience of 1947-48.....and August-September 1965."

On 23 November, Yahya declared a national emergency and complained to the United Nations about an alleged Indian violation of the United Nations Charter. Mrs. Gandhi replied : "Even though Pakistan had declared an emergency, we shall refrain from taking a similar step, unless further aggressive action by Pakistan compels us to do so, in the interest of national security." She visited refugee camps in Calcutta on 3 December and told a mass rally in the city, "No country would want an unstable neighbour. But at the same time India cannot ignore the fact that she has thrice been attacked by Pakistan." Referring to American and other international pressure she declared—"India could no longer be pressurised and prevented from doing what she considered to be in her national interest...Today India can stand on her own legs if all foreign aid is stopped. We are not

dependent on anyone, and we have the strength to overcome all difficulties".

The same day, Yahya opted for an allout war against India. So unexpected was the timing of the war to India that it may be judged from the fact the Prime Minister was visiting Calcutta, Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram was visiting his constituency in Bihar, Finance Minister Chavan was in Bombay and President Giri was attending a reception on the lawns of Parliament House, on that fateful day.

When Mrs. Gandhi learnt the news in Calcutta, she flew to Delhi and after an emergency cabinet meeting addressed the nation : "The war in Bangladesh has become a war on India." Proclaiming a state of national emergency, she assured the nation that "the wanton and unprovoked aggression by Pakistan will be repelled."

As she spoke, the Indian and Pakistan forces, both on the western and eastern fronts, were engaged in war. This was the culmination of the compulsory escalation, which had begun with the Pakistani crackdown in East Pakistan in March 1971.

CHAPTER III

The Rival Forces And Strategies

"During twenty-four years as an independent entity, the Indian Army has been almost continuously engaged in operations : Hyderabad, the Kashmir war of 1947-48, and the permanent state of confrontation that was its heritage, operations in Nagaland, the Chinese confrontation and the consequent war of 1962 (in which its performance was so poor) ; the Mizo Hills insurgency ; and the undeclared war with Pakistan in 1965. The Air Force was involved in some of these wars in a combat role, in others only in transport operations, though always crucially. The Navy stood in the wings, never having been given the chance to come into its own."

"From all these conflicts the watching world formed an image of our military machine : the verdict—a good second-class British left over, steadily declining in operational potential. Surprisingly self-sufficient in weapons and ammunition for a developing nation—it was nevertheless on the wane in actual combat capability. At best it could be considered comparable to the Pakistani armed forces—but, certainly in western eyes, even that was debatable.

MAJ. GEN. D.K. PALIT, VRC, FRGS
(In his book "The Lightening Campaign")

There are three principal objectives in conducting offensive operations :—

(a) To conquer and destroy the enemy's armed forces.

(b) To get possession of material elements of aggression and other resources. This amounts to occupying

important towns, ports and other territory. The consequences of such operations are to force the enemy to seek a negotiated peace.

(c) To win over public opinion. This is achieved by spectacular gains such as the occupation of the enemy's capital. If this can be done, it generally leads to a decisive victory and if the enemy has no military potential to regain his capital it culminates in his final defeat. When this is combined with a popular upsurge the enemy has no choice but to surrender, especially if he has no safe escape route.

— CLAUSEWITZ

(In his military classic on War)

After the partition of British India in 1947 relations between India and Pakistan followed a eollision course, which led to an arms race on the sub-continent. Pakistan being, industrially and economically weak, chose to borrow power to reach military parity with India. She did this by seeking military aid through pacts with major powers like US and Britain, and strengthening diplomatic relations with China, a strong Asiatic power unfriendly to India. In addition, she endeavoured to develop special bond with Islamic countries to seek financial and other material help.

Geographically, Pakistan had a strategic disadvantage as her two wings were widely separated by the vast territory of the Union of India. Contrarily, India had an overall strategic advantage as she could switch her forces operating against one wing of Pakistan to the other easily, while each wing of Pakistan was incapable of influencing operations against the other. Each had to fight its battles in isolation as India could cut off any major movement between the two wings by air and sea.

The Pakistani Army in early 1971 comprised of twelve infantry divisions, two armoured divisions and an independent armoured brigade. Two extra divisions were in the process of being raised to meet the additional requirement necessitated by

the upsurge in the eastern wing, but were not fully operational when the war began.

The Pakistani Air Force consisted of six squadrons of MIG-19 supersonic interceptors, six squadrons of Sabre fighters, one squadron of Mirage supersonic fighters, two squadrons of B-57 bombers and one squadron of IL-28 bombers—in all seventeen combat squadrons. Of these only one squadron of Sabres was located in East Pakistan.

The Pakistani Navy consisted of four submarines, one light cruiser, two destroyers, three destroyers escorts, two frigates and four patrol boats.

Pakistan's para-military forces numbered some 2,50,000 men, located mainly for watch and ward duties over the border areas.

Of the Pakistani armed forces, one division of four brigades—14 PAK Division—was normally located in East Bengal. The only heavy elements available to this division were an armoured regiment (about 50 chaffee tanks) and a few artillery units. Air support was provided by one squadron of Sabre fighters, some helicopters and various light transport aircraft. The East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) consisted of some 20,000 men-mixed West Pakistanis and Bengalis, but were mainly officered by West Pakistanis. By early March this garrison was reinforced by rapid and secret induction of two divisions from the western wing. Thereafter the build-up continued until October and four infantry divisions, totalling some 42 battalions, as well as 20,000 or more West Punjab Rangers, had been inducted to replace the EPR.

The Indian Army, at the beginning of 1971, with a total strength of just over eight and a quarter lacs of men, was organised into thirteen infantry divisions, ten mountain divisions, several independent infantry brigades, two parachute brigades, one armoured division and some independent armoured brigades. In armour, the Indian Army had increased its strength since 1965 by about 450 T-55 and T-56 Russian medium tanks, 300 Vijayantas and some Centurians. Its light armour consisted of AMX-13 French tanks and the Russian PT-76s.

The Indian Air Force had an approximate total of 90,000 men and 625 combat aircraft in 1965, but was considerably expanded and modernised in the following years. It had seven squadrons of MIG-21 supersonic interceptor fighters, five squadrons of Sukhoi-7 fighter bombers, seven squadrons of Gnat interceptors, six squadrons of Hunter fighter bombers, two squadrons of HF-24 trans-sonic fighters and three squadrons of Canberra bombers. It was also equipped for radar surveillance, better communication system and surface-to-air anti-aircraft missile systems around important targets in India.

The Indian Navy consisted of some 40,000 men. The main units were one aircraft carrier, two cruisers, three destroyers, two destroyer escorts, five-Peyta class petrol vessels, four F-class Russian ocean-going submarines and some landing craft and minesweeping vessels.

Territorially, the Indian Army was organised into four commands : Western Command consisted of three army corps of a total of thirteen infantry and one armoured division and some armoured brigades. Western Command also had two mountain divisions facing the Himalayan front from Ladakh to the Simla Sector. Central Command's operational responsibility was in the central-northern sector of the Himlayas. Eastern Command consisted of three army corps—and its operational responsibility extended to the Sikkim, Bhutan and NEFA sector in the North, Nagaland, Mizoram and the border with East Pakistan. Southern Command's area of responsibility was in the Kutch sector and in Rajasthan.

The Air Force is organised into four commands—the Western, Central and Eastern operations and Maintenance Command.

The Navy had two fleets—one each for the Eastern and Western waters.

In the past, Pakistan, aware of her incapability to be strong in both her wings based her strategy on retaining decisive strength in West Pakistan. She assumed that any war with India would be short in duration, because international

pressure would enforce a ceasefire before any decisive results could be achieved by either side. She, therefore, maintained only minimal forces in the East and was prepared to accept loss of territory there. The aim was to economise troops for a profitable offensive in the West, so as to offset the territorial losses in the East. She also hoped that China would come to her help, specially by lying down a large number of Indian forces in the North, thus reducing the margin of Indian superiority against East Pakistan. Therefore until 1971, Pakistan's plan was to fight India on one front only, while India had to plan for war on two fronts : Pakistan in the West and China in the North.

However, the civil war compelled the Pakistanis to reinforce their forces in the East, thus throwing out of gear their strategic plans which upset their military potential in the West. Three divisions had to be moved from the West to the East. The men of East Bengal Regiment CEBR and EPR had to be disarmed, fought and replaced with West Pakistani Para-military forces. To add to the dilemma, many Bengali military personnel in the west deserted and crossed over to India in a bid to join the guerrillas in the East. Although the Bengali units in the West were neither disbanded or disarmed, they could not be relied upon in the event of a war with India.

The Pakistani Air Force and Navy were equally affected by the disaffection of the Bengalis. They had a squadron of Sabre-jets in the East at Tajgaon airfield in Dacca. They tried hard to build another airfield at Kurmitola to add to their fighting capability. But on account of their poor warning system and limitation of operative air fields, they stood no chance in an all out fight against the IAF. Similarly, the Pakistani Navy was virtually non-existent in the East.

The Pakistani Army, which was strategically prepared to fight on one front was forced to be deployed on three fronts—West, East and also the guerrillas. In East Pakistan, it was more or less shunned by the population, which deprived it of its intelligence sources. In West, the potential to undertake an offensive had diminished considerably.

A large number of infantry formations had moved to the eastern wing without their supporting arms like armour, artillery and engineers. The formations were split up in battalion and company groups and scattered over wide areas for internal security duties. Adequate logistical support was not catered for to maintain the increased strength of armed forces effectively. Consequently, Pakistan's armed forces were unbalanced and disorganised for a major war in either wing and needed much time and resources to regain their equilibrium as an effective fighting force.

When Niazi took over from Tikka Khan in September 1971, his task was "to prevent internal subversion and defend East Pakistan against external aggression", but no written directive was given to him. As the possibility of a war in East Pakistan became apparent, the Pakistani High Command was left with no option but to recast a new strategy to cope with the changing situation. The three infantry divisions were joined by their essential components and steps were taken to strengthen the defence of East Pakistan.

However, Islamabad did not consider an all-out Indian offensive against East Pakistan feasible. They perceived that the possible Indian aim would be to capture a large chunk of territory to establish a Bangladesh Government in East Pakistan and then to transfer the bulk of refugees in the liberated areas. Niazi thought that India's strategic objective would not extend further than the major river lines, on which the defences of Dacca were based.

Niazi assessed the threat to the various regions of East Pakistan keeping in mind factors like terrain, the main axes of ingress, important towns and ports, India's likely intentions, the relative military strength of the two sides and the importance of certain areas to Pakistan. His assessment of the threat was as follows :

(a) **North-Western Sector** —The most obvious feature of importance in this sector was the Siliguri corridor and its proximity to the Chinese based in Chumbi Valley. Niazi appreciated that it would give India a considerable advantage by widening

the corridor and hence a major offensive would be launched here. Niazi was also hopeful of linking up with the Chinese in this area in case of a combined operation. Another important tactical feature in this sector was the Hili waistline through which an attacking force could cut the forces in this sector into two. Niazi allotted 16 Infantry Division under Maj. General Nazar Hussain Shah for the defence of this sector. The division had 10 Infantry battalions, one Mujahid battalion and one regiment of Chaffee tanks.

(b) **South-Western Sector** —Jessore, the second most important town, and Khulna, the second most important industrial area, in the province. were the two towns of prestige in this area. Chalura, south of Khulna, had been developed as an alternative to Calcutta port and offered a link with West Pakistan by sea. Hardinge Bridge linked this sector with the North-Western Sector. Niazi appreciated a major Indian thrust in this sector and allotted B Infantry Division and a squadron of Chaffee tanks commanded by Maj. Gen. M.H. Ansari to defend this sector. Major concentration of effort was around Jessore and to protect the approaches to Hardinge Bridge.

(c) **Northern Sector** —This sector included Tangail and Dacca and had poor road communications. The Brahmaputra, a local river, ran across the approaches from the North towards Dacca. Even though the sector provided the least number of water obstacles. Niazi, because of the absence of good towns and communications on the Indian side of the border, and the presence of comparatively smaller forces, appreciated that the Indians had accorded a low priority to this sector. This sector was allotted 36 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Jamshed Khan with headquarters at Dacca.

(d) **Eastern Sector** —This sector was the farthest from

the developed area of Bengal and had poor communications with the main basis in India. It provided the nearest approach to Dacca and the river line at Meghna. Considering the layout of the communications, Niazi appreciated that Sylhet in the North offered the best scope for operations and had suitable conditions for resettling refugees from the India's point of view, Niazi also felt that Chittagong was indefensible. Therefore, to defend this long and narrow sector he deployed two divisions. Around the middle of November, Niazi shifted his main weight to the southern area, thinking that the main offensive would develop from that side.

Niazi should have deployed his troops well forward with adequate depth, because the best course open to him was to adopt a plan which could gain him maximum time and delay the fall of Dacca as long as possible. However, he opted to prefer a politically desirable solution which was to surrender the least amount of territory. He therefore deployed his troops well forward but in linear defence, which in the absence of adequate reserves made his defences weak.

He was aware that he could be blockaded and isolated from West Pakistan by the Indian Navy, and accordingly, prepared to fight without re-inforcements or logistical replenishments for his theatre of operations. He also correctly evaluated that his troops would have to operate under complete domination of the IAF and that his land and river communications would be paralysed by day by the IAF and by night by the Mukhti Bahini.

Naizi had three courses open to him for the defence of East Pakistan :

(a) To deploy along the border and gradually withdraw behind the major rivers to defend the Dacca Bowl. This involved dispersing his forces in penny-pockets and exposure during withdrawal to the IAF and the Mukti Bahini. Although the dispersal would check minor Indian incursions or infiltrations,

it would also give the Indians an opportunity to concentrate at the point of decision.

(b) To concentrate on the defence of the Dacca Bowl which would determine the fate of East Pakistan. This course was politically not acceptable to Islamabad, because occupation of large territories by the Indian force without much opposition would boost the morale of the Mukti Bahini and the local population, who would rise against the West Pakistani Forces.

(c) To have theatre fortresses by converting important border towns and communication centres. These were to be well forward at the main avenues of ingress,strongly defended, in depth, stocked with sufficient qualities of food and linked up with communications. Any force bypassing a fortress would be vulnerable to a flanking attack by the next fortress. Also, offensive operations could be launched from these fortresses.

Gen. Hamid, Commander-in-Chief, Pakistani Army, visited Dacca in September and discussed the plans with Niazi. Pakistani CHQ approved the theatre fortress concept, and recommended that Dacca should be treated as the pivot for the defence of East Pakistan. They also advised that offensive action towards Malda area and raids on Farrakka Barrage should be included in the plan. Niazi laid down that they would fight to the "last man and last round" in the designated theatre fortresses. He had no reserves and no comprehensive plan for the denial of routes or rivercraft to the Indian forces. The timing of the operations was not in favour of Pakistan. The possibility of Chinese intervention was reduced because it was snowing heavily in the northern Himalayas. Also East Bengal is comparatively drier in these months, which facilitates mobile offensive operations. Aerial action is possible without hazards or restriction of weather. Thus, when Pakistan declared war on India on 3 December, after a prolonged period which was operationally favourable to her, it bought for herself a decisive defeat in the eastern wing.

On the Indian side, the defence structure works under the Defence Minister, with each Chief responsible for his own Service. Plans are co-ordinated by the Chairman of the Chief of Staff Committee. Gen. SHFJ Manekshaw was the Chief of Staff and also Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee Air Chief Marshal P C. Lal was the Chief of Air Staff and Admiral S,M. Nanda the Chief of Naval Staff. Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora was the Army Commander in Calcutta and responsible for the operations against East Pakistan. Maj. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob was the Chief of Staff to Aurora and served him well in that capacity.

The strategical conditions were favourable to India. On the international plane, the indo- Soviet Treaty of Friendship pledged full support and served notice to China not to interfere in the struggle Further, the advent of winter in China had rendered large scale offensive operations extremely difficult. The rivers in East Pakistan were free from floods and the going in general was easy.

Manekshaw decided to concentrate maximum efforts on offensive operations against East Pakistan. He exercised an economy of efforts by adopting a general defensive position in the West. Making full use of the eight months of respite, he planned on unquestioned supremacy and blockade in the East. Similarly, he envisaged complete air superiority in the East after the first few days of war. The Mukti Bahini and air reconnaissance sorties brought in excellent intelligence, and the West Bengal is appeared to be ready to take up arms against their masters.

The Indian Army was not prepared to launch an offensive at short notice and therefore, opted for a longer reaction time before undertaking major operations in the East. But considering the confusion in the Pakistani Army, Indian forces could have completed operation successfully before the monsoons. Pakistan had very few troops in the East and they were already involved in serious fighting with the EBR and EPR. The Pakistani Army in the East was disorganised, their heavier supporting elements were still in transit and the logistical details were not yet tied up propely. However, a premonsoon offensive by the Indian

forces would have substantiated Yahya's claims that India was trying to wage a war against Pakistan for nothing. Considering all these aspects, Manekshaw decided to undertake deliberate and well prepared operations rather than history exploitation of Pakistani Army's confusion and weakness in East Pakistan.

The ultimate objectives of the India High Command in East Pakistan were as follows :—

(a) **Capture of Dacca** :—This could have liberated Bangladesh at the earlist and ensured that surrender of the Pakistani forces. It involved crossing big rivers along chosen approaches in strength and the river crossing equipment would entail judicious allotment of the available sources. Helicopters could be made use of for vertical envelopment in mobile operations, especially because of air supremacy was certain and the local population was on the side of the Indian forces.

The risk involved would have been that Dacca may not have fallen before the cease fire. This would have left the advancing forces in unfavourable tactical positions. withholding towns of prestige, but inadequate territories for return of the refugees.

(b) **Clear territory up to the river lines and surrounding Dacca bowl for subsequent operations** :—This would have involved a limited advance along most of the peripheral areas in all sectors. Since the Indian forces were stronger everywhere they could have concentrated at a number of pre-selected points to break through, defeating the opposing force in detail. This was the safest strategy to ensure capture of maximum territory and important towns even though Dacca would not have fallen early, especially if the Pakistanis had been permitted to fall back gradually to defend the Dacca Bowl. Such a course might have ended up in a stalemate. Contrarily, an improvised plan after capturing the river lines for a race to Dacca would have turned the tide in favour of the Indian forces.

The Indian strategists based their choice of objectives on their assessment of Pakistani strength, dispositions, intentions and morale and own resources. The psychological aspect of blockade, superiority in the air, guerrilla activities, political compulsion, and the massive hostility of the local population was given due regard to.

The task allotted to Eastern Command by Army Headquarters was to destroy the bulk of Pakistani forces in the Eastern Theatre and to occupy the major portion of East Pakistan, including the entry ports of Chittagong and Chalna/Khulna. When Admiral Nanda assured that the ports will be made accessible in the early stages of the war, capturing of the ports by land was given a low priority.

Aurora formulated a pronged offensive from as many directions as possible to destroy the Pakistani forces and capture maximum territory. Command Headquarters assessed the various sectors and allotted resources and tasks as under :—

(a) **North Western Sector** —33 Corps with 20 Mountain Division and an additional brigade was employed in this Sector. It also had two armoured regiments less a squadron and one engineer brigade. In addition, 71 Mountain Brigade operated from the North. The task was to cut the Hili-Gaibanda waistline and thereafter, the situation permitting, capture Bogra or Rangpur.

(b) **South Western Sector**—This sector was allotted two divisions, one parachute brigade less one battalion, one armoured regiment and one squadron. The objectives were Jessore and Jhenida and thrusts were then to be launched for the capture of Khulna, Hardinge Bridge, Faridpur and Goalundo Ghat ferries.

(c) **Northern Sector**—Although it contained the best approach to capture Dacca, only one brigade plus paramilitary forces were to operate in this area. A parachute drop by one battalion was planned at

Tangail in this sector. There was no armour allotted to this sector.

(d) **Eastern Sector**—4 Corps, which was to operate in this sector, was allotted three divisions less one brigade, Kilo Force having two battalions, a number of EBR battallions and two squadrons of armour. The task was to clear the sector east of Meghna and to capture Chittagong.

From it was amply clear that the plans were aimed at clearing territory only upto the river line. The plan did not give any indication that the ultimate objective was Dacca.

Thus the over all strategy of the Indian High Command was offensive—defensive containing the Pakistani forces in the West and delivering a decisive blow in the east.

The war began at 5.45 p.m. on 3 December, when the Pakistani Air force made a pre-emptive strike on a number of Indian air-fields all alohg the Indian border, notable at Srinagar, Avantipur, Pathankot, Uttarlai, Jodhpur, Ambala and also Agra. The first Pakistani land attack went in at 8.30 p.m. that day, against the Indian Army's Poonch and Chamb Seetors. In the events that followed the back of the PAF was broken by the IAF and the Pakistani offensive all along the western border from Kashmir in the north to Rajasthan in the south-west, was checked by the Indian Army. The offensive-defensive strategy paid off brilliantly. The Army Headquarters was relieved of any anxiety about its western front and was free to pursue a lightening offensive in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER IV

The People at War

"The Indian Lieutenant passed the journalists to a wizened man of perhaps 60, who carried an old carbine and identified himself as "Mukti Bahini"—the guerrilla military arm—and then set off at a brisk pace through a drenching rainstorm. Foundering in the thick mud, the journalists followed him on a twisting four-mile hike though rice paddies and beside a border marker dividing India and East Pakistan. At the end of the March was an abandoned school-house, now identified by a banner as sub-sector headquarters for the Liberation Forces of Bangladesh".

"Major Najmul Huda, a 33-year old precisely spoken man, who said he had been a Captain in the Pakistani Army, asserted that from the school-house he controls an area of 150 square miles. He has a company of some hundred regular soldiers who defected to the rebel cause and 7,000 villagers trained by his forces. The guerrillas claim to have implanted such headquarters throughout East Pakistan, and say they are intensifying an insurgery that will drive the regular Pakistani Army from the territory in a year or so".

—A report by an observer in East Pakistan.

If all conflicts were regulated by the so-called "Laws of Warfare" it would imply that weaker nations or groups of people would never be able to offer resistance to recognisably superior military powers. But the human spirit being what it is cannot afford to accept this situation. From the very dawn of history, weak and oppressed countries have fought against superior forces—very often with success. This form of warfare, which is generally called the guerrilla warfare has a

different significance altogether, as it does not take the form of normal conventional warfare. The forces engaged in guerrilla warfare adopt methods of their own that help them offset their inferiority in numbers, arms and equipment. As for the realities of war the guerrillas must offer resistance—whatever the odds, however unconventional the methods, victory for them is a distant hope ; their aim is resistance—to gain time.

Yahya's brutal 'crackdown' shattered the spirit of the Bengali population in East Pakistan, despite their efforts to resist oppression of the Pakistani Army. But as time passed, the Bengalis rose to put up a gallant fight by raising a guerrilla force, which later came to be known as Mukti Bahini. Never in the history of man's resistance to a foreign oppressor has there been such a unique motivation as was displayed by the people of Bangladesh. A peace-loving, gentle, cultured and naturally docile people, the Bengalis have never shone in the fields of mercenary or professional militarism. However, their thinking was always marked by a core of acute political consciousness and from this trait emanated the Liberation Forces of Bangladesh—the Mukti Bahini, which played a major part in paralysing the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan greatly facilitated the lightening campaign of the Indian Army.

At the time of Yahya's order for a crackdown, the Pakistani Army had twelve West Pakistani infantry battalions, in addition to artillery units and one mixed armoured regiment, in the eastern wing. There were six battalions of EBR with a training centre at Chittagong, which was commended by Brig. Majumdar. There were also about thirteen thousand personnel of the EPR a border security organisation, and about 50,000 Razakars who were trained as home-guards.

The EPR consisted mainly of Bengalis except for their officers, JCOs and NCOs, who were West Pakistanis.

The Razakars were the main collaborators with the Pakistanis, and comprised of the Mujahids, who were partly armed with obsolete guns and rifles, and the Ansaris who were armed with lathis and spares. In addition to these there were about 50,000 policemen in the province.

When the Indian sub-continent was partitioned in 1947, a large number of Muslims from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh migrated to East Pakistan, where they generally came to be known as Biharis. For various reasons they allied themselves with the West Pakistanis, but did not mix with the local Bengali speaking population, who took a distrust to the new-comers. The Mujahids were almost wholly composed of Biharis or other non-Biharis but also contained some Bengalis. The Mujahids remained staunch henchmen of the West Pakistanis throughout the genocide operations of the Indian Army. Ansaris were not nearly as fanatical as the Mujahids and the Bengalis amongst them defected to a man when the uprising started. After 25th March, the West Pakistanis resorted to disarm the EBR and EPR units. Although the Bengali elements in the Pakistani Army and paramilitary forces were not prepared for a violent struggle, the strong nationalistic sentiment drove them to take extreme steps. To begin with, the men of the EPR killed their West Pakistani officers and awaited events. At this stage, some nationalist Bengali officers raised the flag of revolt and decided to fight it out with the Pakistani Army. Maj. Ziaur Rehman, the late President of Bangladesh, broadcast a declaration of independence of Bangladesh on 27 March 1971. Following this, a number of other Bengali officers also decided to fight for the freedom of Bangladesh. However, by the end of April, the Pakistani Army cleared most sensitive areas and organised to repress any armed resistance by the Bengalis. The few encounters with the West Pakistanis taught the Bengalis that unless they wanted to get involved in heavy casualities, their only chance of success against the Pakistani Army was to avoid the conventional warfare and adopt guerrilla tactics. So the remants of EBR and EPR withdrew to organise such resistance.

In the meanwhile, million of refugees had been crossing over the international border, to India. The long border provided the guerrillas in the Indian territory, with the swamps, jungles, rivers, the vast number of villages, the impending monsoon, and the inherent sympathy of the civil population, excellent sanctuaries. A large number of men of the EBR and EPR and civil police became the hard core of

the guerrillas. Although these forces had fled to India with most of their weapons and ammunition, their basic role was of conventional warfare with specialisation in collection of border intelligence and anti-smuggling. If these forces were to achieve viable results against the Pakistani Army it could not be done without the active support of a strong foreign power.

On 13 April 1971, the provisional government of Bangladesh was proclaimed at Mujibnagar, Col. Osmani was appointed Commander-in-Chief to organise armed resistance against the Pakistani Army with the ultimate aim of winning freedom. Without loss of time, he undertook to organise the guerrillas, the Liberation Forces of Bangladesh—the Mukti Bahini. Training camps were organised on a regional basis to recruit, train and induct the guerrillas. However, the influence of central direction of the guerrillas was limited because of lack of good communications. long distances along the border and the non-availability of political and military leadership. The intention was to induct an increasing number of Mukti Bahini into the interior of the province to instigate revolts and to create and maintain disturbed conditions. The leaders of Bangladesh hoped that ultimately India would be compelled to come to their aid and liberate Bangladesh.

Col. Osmani created separate sectored commands : Maj. Ziaur Rehman in Chittagong, Maj. Musharaf in Comilla, Maj. Safi Ullah in Myamensingh, Wing Cdr. Bustar in Rangpur, Lt. Col. Saman in Rajshahi, Maj. Osman in Kushtia and Maj. Jahil in Khulna. In Tangail sector, a few young, educated and adventurous leaders like Noorul Kadar and 'Tiger' Siddiqui also organised resistance against the Pakistani Army.

In the meanwhile, the Pakistani Army embarked upon a reign of terrorism in order to beat the Bengalis into submission. Exemplary punishments were meted out to anyone suspected of giving food, shelter and showing sympathy to the guerrillas. The entire regular army supported by Razakars was reorganised to meet the duel role of conventional as well as anti-guerrillas warfare. After the initial success in re-establishing a semblance of law and order the Pakistanis adopted an 'out-post strategy' along the main routes of ingress

in order to prevent the guerrillas from infiltrating into the interior of the province.

East Pakistan was in a state of turmoil and its inhabitants were stricken with terror. Millions had fled from their home land to seek security across the Indian border. A large number of suspects were taken into custody by the Pakistani Army. Although the common people sympathised with the freedom fighters, they were too scared to give them any material aid in the fear of violent reprisals. The guerrillas soon became aware of the difference between their leaders' plans and the actualities of the struggle. The fine concept of the guerrillas living like a fish in the vast sea of Bengali population, went awry because of environmental difficulties.

Two main factors were responsible for the inability of the Mukti Bahini to produce any substantial results in the initial stages of their campaign for freedom. Firstly, the freedom fighters of Bangladesh had little political indoctrination or motivation. They had joined the training camp in a state of nationalist fervour and had undergone a crash training programme for three weeks or so. They had no trained military or politically motivated cadre of junior leaders and the Awami League leaders were reluctant to face the hazards of military struggle. Also, they had to operate from across the border, in the absence of any sanctuaries in the province itself. Secondly, the local support—the prime requirement for the success of guerrilla operations was not available due to the fear instilled in the minds of the local population by the Pakistani Army. The elements of the Mukti Bahini, being young and inexperienced, could not influence the villagers to support their cause.

However, as the number of trained guerrillas increased, their activities began showing positive results. Although they had initially sought contact with the Pakistani troops in the hope of inflicting losses on them, they soon learnt to avoid such direct confrontations, because of the heavy casualities they suffered. Their new tactics entailed terrorising the West Pakistanis to make them realise that there would be no lasting peace until the demands of the Awami League were met. The

guerrillas moved freely in the countryside making use of the numerous water courses, while the Pakistani Army usually remained road-bound and occasionally used the main water channels. The superior mobility of the guerrilla bands enabled them to extend their area of control, especially in the jungle around Tangail and the Sunderbans, and the marshes around Pabna and Khulna.

The emphasis in training guerrillas was on quantity rather than quality and it was decided by their leaders to arm about 10,00,000 of them, and induct them inside the province in an increasing steady stream. But around August, the limitations of the guerrillas became apparent to their planners, who were regular conventional soldiers, so they chose to group the guerrillas into sections for operations, to give them cohesiveness and improved firepower, in the hope that they would gain confidence to operate deeper inside East Pakistan. At the same time, plans were made to raise and equip seven EBR battalions to build a back-up force for the guerrillas. The aim was to create a regular armed force to defend Bangladesh after independence. Three depleted EBR battalions located in Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong areas, were reinforced from the cadres of the Mukti Bahini. Although short of experienced officers, these units received priority over the guerrillas in the matter of personnel, weapons and training.

By this time, a few Bengali officers had joined the Mukti Bahini after escaping from West Pakistan. But the Mukti Bahini still continued to be a loose force, without discipline and regulations, and therefore, required group pressure to make the individuals participate in operations against the Pakistani Army. There was also a growing resentment amongst the ranks and files of the freedom fighters against their political and military leaders, who were felling to them face military conflict while they lived in comfort and safety. A number of local armed bands, who were outside the control of the Mukti Bahini, also operated on their own. Also there was much rivalry and distrust among the various groups which comprised the guerrillas. As a result, despite all the publicity received by them, all that the guerrillas could achieve were scattered acts of terrorism. The fondly believed theory that guerrillas

warfare could create chaotic conditions in the country, leading to bleeding the Pakistani authority to a slow and certain death, proved to be a wild dream.

By the end of October the EBR was recognised and the strength of the Mukti Bahini increased considerably. It was then planned to create an atmosphere of general turmoil by employment of masses of guerrillas all along the border in small numbers. A number of small posts on the border were occupied by the guerrillas and much publicity was given to their capability to liberate and hold territory. The Pakistani forces invariably reacted against such incursions strongly, using artillery and full forces, which often led to clashes with the border security forces of India. Indian Army had to deploy artillery and troops to support the outposts as well as the guerrillas. This resulted increased tension all along the international boundary. The Pakistanis moved their troops forward over the border to ensure the security of their outposts and to recapture those they had lost along the important routes of ingress.

This new development necessitated the Pakistani Army to disperse its forces, because it was trapped in a war of outposts to counter the activities of the guerrillas. The Pakistani Army succeeded in wresting some of the outposts from the guerrillas. They were nov. required to hold and consolidate these. This entailed reinforcing the posts with more troops, which resulted in further depleting their reserves in the rear. The Mukti Bahini's initial aim was three fold : firstly, to kill Pakistani soldiers and capture their weapons ; secondly, to deny all communications to the Pakistani Army ; and thirdly, to intensify economic warfare—or to sum up to wage a war of attrition. After 3 December, when hostilities between India and Pakistan became open, their aim enlarged : firstly, to work on the flanks of the Pakistani forces ; secondly, to be in the van of the Indian troops, and thirdly, to stock local hostility against the Pakistani forces. The Mukti Bahini divided itself into two forces to achieve this aim. The regulars who fought side by side with the Indian troops, and the guerrillas who operated in the rear of the Pakistani forces.

In the first week of December, the Mukti Bahini regulars excelled themselves by capturing a series of positions in the Saldanndi area—Joymanishat, Dormer, Dimla and Joldjaka in the North. Thereafter they captured Chattak in the Sylhet area,—Sylhet Akhaura, Brahmanbaria, North of Akhaura and Feni in the South thereby cutting off the routes of withdrawal of the Pakistani Army to the port of Chittagong.

The Mukti Bahini also had its Naval and airforce wings. The naval wing which included trained frogmen carried out daring operations and destroyed 1,00,000 ton of shipping, sinking or damaging some 25 Pakistani ships. The naval wings area of activity was Mangla, Chittagong, Chandpur, Narayanganj and Padma and Brahmaputra rivers. The air wing of Mukti Bahini comprised of two helicopters, an Ottar fitted to carry rockets and one Dakota, besides 20 pilots from the Pakistani Airforce who mostly operated in ground role.

Guerrilla warfare is unique in many ways. The regular soldiers are trained to measure the progress of operations in conventional warfare by their movements in relation to the main line of resistance or to the capture or loss of towns or tactical features. But in guerrilla warfare, there is no main line of resistance or contact, and it is therefore non-linear. Thus, unlike in the conventional warfare, in which it is easy to assess the degree of success in operations, in guerrilla warfare, there is no such yardstick till the last stage, when conventional war by organised bodies of troops begins. Statistics of killings, demolished buildings and bridges, destruction of installations and factories can be used as a measure of success, but these can be faked since most of these operations take place in the interior, and cannot be checked back as to the authenticity of their conduct and success.

But the success of guerrilla warfare cannot be judged by its tangible results alone—for its psychological aspect is more important. In Bangladesh, the operations of the Mukti Bahini, despite their limited success, proved to be of great importance. The activities of the guerrillas and the publicity given to them kept the fires of freedom aglow in the breast of the people of

Bangladesh, who avidly awaited for the deliverance from the yoke of West Pakistani colonisation. The persistance of the struggle definitely affected the morale of the Pakistani Army as also of the civil population. The strife attracted attention all over the world and gradually won sympathy and understanding for the Bengalis. The direct impact of the guerrilla warfare was not great, and although the contribution of the Mukti Bahini to the final outcome of the war was limited in the tactical sphere, strategically it achieved its aim fully. The Bengali masses never gave up hope of eventual freedom and the Pakistani Army could not pacify the countryside. Maintenance of law and order became a major problem and the police and Razakars needed constant aid from the regular army. This diversion further reduced the Pakistani Army's capability to defend the province in the event of an armed intervention by India. The Pakistani Army was compelled to adopt a forward posture involving faulty strategic deployment, a rigid policy which deprived it of balance and reserves.

The Pakistani Army's hard crust-line with a hollow inside cracked instantly when the Indian forces moved in support of the aspirations and efforts of the people of Bangladesh. The Bengali masses rose as one man against the Pakistanis, supporting the advancing Indian troops with valuable information, labour and transport, which greatly assisted the large scale military operations. As a result, the Indian Army's advances met with a success beyond all expectations.

The words of Niazi "They (the Mukti Bahini) made me deaf and blind"—sum up the contribution of the Liberation Forces of Bangladesh to the overall war efforts of the Indian Army.

The tribute paid by Mujib to the Indian Army after the liberation of Bangladesh expresses the feeling of its people. At a farewell parade held in Dacca he pronounced—"You have sided with us in our peril. You trained our boys, gave them arms and joined in our struggle, I have no language to express my gratitude."

Such was the rapport between the Indian Army, which was the embodiment of the people of India and their national values, and those of Bangladesh, whose quest for freedom and the valiant fight they put up against the Pakistani 'neo-colonisation' has become an epic in the history of mankind.

CHAPTER V

The North-Western Sector

The Pakistan staff officer told the platoon commander at Charkai : "Don't imagine things. How can tanks come when there are so many bheels, marshes and mines there ? You must have seen buffaloes."

The young captain replied : "You must be right, Sir. But I swear the buffaloes have 100 milimetre guns fitted on them and they are picking off our bunkers one by one."

—SADIQ SALIK

(In his book "Witness to Surrender")

The North-Western Sector which covered approximately one third of East Pakistan, consisted of the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra, Pabna and Rajshahi. It was bounded by the strategically vital Siliguri corridor in the North, the Brahmaputra (Jamuna) in the East, the Ganga (Padma) in the South and West Dinajpur and Malda districts of West Bengal in the West. The sector was isolated from the rest of the East Pakistan by the Jamuna and Ganga rivers except for Hardinge Bridge, which linked it with the South-Western sector.

The sector had three prominent areas of tactical significance. The Siliguri corridor comprised of the narrow belt in the plains with the mountain ranges of Sikkim and Nepal in the north and Titulaya at the north-western tip of East Pakistan. Through this bottleneck passed all the road, rail and air routes from the mainland of India to the eastern region of North Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. The most important of these were the oil pipelines from Assam to Barauni, the Asian highway, the railway tracks

to Gauhati and Bongaigoan and the important airport of Bagdogra.

The corridor was a sensitive and critical area being very close to the Chumbi Valley, where the Chinese had a strong military base. A joint operation by China and Pakistan against this area would result in cutting off the eastern region of India from the rest of the country. Contrarily, a widening of this belt would provide India added security and a firm base for military operations against the North-eastern, Northern and Eastern Sectors of Pakistan.

The narrow waistline linking Hili and Gaibanda and Phulchari ferry on the Jamuna formed by the Balurghat Bulge jutting into East Pakistan lies in the middle of North-western Sector. It was the shortest and most obvious approach to cut the north-south rail, road and river communications, thus dividing the sector into two.

The Malda area which lies further south was the other area of tactical importance in this sector. The Farakka Barrage was nearly complete and was vulnerable to threat by the Pakistanis, which would have serious repercussions in India, materially and psychologically.

The general lay of the terrain is in the North-South direction and most of the rivers flow South from the Himalayas in the North. The important rivers are—Depa, West of Dinajpur ; Jamuna, West of Hili ; Karatoya, West of Pirganj, turning due East in the North of Bogra ; Mahanada, West of Nawabganj, interposing a major obstacle between Malda and Rajshahi ; and Ichhamati. The sector is criss-crossed by numerous nullas, which form major water obstacles, particularly before joining the rivers. (Map No. 2)

The main all-weather highway ran from Titulaya in the north west to Bera Ferry opposite Dacca connecting the towns of Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna. The lateral road linking Bera with Rajshahi and Nawabganj. Another road ran from Dinajpur to Phulbari with a track to Hili via Charkai, which was linked with Pirganj on the main highway. There

were two main approaches to reach the highway : the Hili—Goraghat approach and the Samja-Phulbari-Charkai axis. Most important places on the Indian side were connected with the border posts by road, providing easy access to the international border.

The North-western Sector provided the longest approach to Dacca and involved crossing many water obstacles, in addition to the great Jamuna, for an advance on to the Capital. The sector was however, more suitable for mobile operations than the rest of East Pakistan.

16 Pakistan division commanded by Nazar Hussain Shah with his headquarters at Rangpur was responsible for the security of this sector. They appreciated that the Indian Army would concentrate its major efforts against the waistline and the Rangpur area. He assessed that a total of two divisions would advance against him along the following axes :—

(a) Two brigades along the Domar-Saidpur axis to Rangpur. It was an attractive approach for the capture of Rangpur was easier, in the absence of any water obstacle.

(b) A minimum of one brigade along the Pachgarh, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur axis.

(c) A major thrust by one division along the Hili-Goraghat axis to divide his force, with the aim of destroying it in detail.

(d) Because of the poor approach routes from Balurghat and Malda, a threat to Bogra via Patnitola or Nawabganj was not possible.

To meet this threat, Nazar Hussain deployed his forces as follows :—

(a) 23 Infantry Brigade under Brig. Ansari in Saidpur-Rangpur-Dinajpur area.

(b) 205 Infantry Brigade under Brig. Tejjamul Hussain in the waistline including Hili, Goraghat, Patnitola and Bogra.

(c) 34 Infantry Brigade under Brig. Mohammed Nayeem in Rajshahi, Nawabganj and Nator.

(d) 29 Cavalry was to support 23 and 205 Infantry Brigades.

(e) Later, 57 Brigade under Brig. Manzoor Ahmed fell back into the sector from the Kushtia area on 10 December.

On the Indian side, 33 Corps commanded by Lt. Gen M.L. Thapan was responsible for the operations in this sector. The main offensive was to be launched by 20 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh, VRC. It had been allotted two armoured regiments less one squadron. The task allotted were as follows :—

(a) 71 Mountain Brigade under Brig. P.N. Kathpalia to advance along Pachagarh—Thakurgaon axis and capture Dinajpur.

(b) 202 Mountain Brigade under Brig. F.P. Bhtty, SM, to capture Hili and then Palasbarir along the Goraghat axis in conjugation with 66 Mountain Brigade.

(c) 66 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Joginder Singh Bakshi, VSM, to contain Dinajpur and act as reserve.

71 Mountain Brigade started operations in late November with the aim of widening the Siliguri corridor. Kathpalia planned to cut it off from the South and advancing with one battalion from the North. The town of Titulaya was captured on the afternoon of the fourth day. It was discovered that the Pakistanis had pulled out their guns and vehicles on the first night, while the infantry company had slipped out on the third night on foot along the Karatoya river bed.

On 27 November, a battalion with a squadron of armour advanced and secured Buda, half way between Pachagarh and Thakurgaon. Kathapalia planned to attack Thakurgaon with a battalion, from the North, while establishing a road block with one company in the South. But the Pakistanis slipped out before the actual attack came. At this stage, Brig. Ansari

was recalled for his failure to defend Thakurgaon and Brig. Shaffi was appointed in his stead und made responsible for operations along Dinajpur-Saidpur axis.

On 3 December, Kathapalia was placed under the command of Maj. Gen. P.C. Reddy of 6 Mountain Division. 71 Brigade captured Birganj on 5 December, but the next day its advance was held up by Pakistani fire from their Kantanagar bridge area. Based on the information that Dinajpur was evacuated by the Pakistanis two companies were despatched to occupy the town. But this force was compelled to fall back in case of strong opposition from Dinajpur.

On 10 December, the plan to capture Dinajpur was abandoned and Kathapalia now planned to cross the Dhepa near Khansama and advance to Saidpur. The Pakistanis, who had prepared strong positions at Khansama withdrew when their rear was threatened and a bridge was constructed over the river. A bridgehead was established and a counter attack force sent by Brig. Shaffi, who had moved from Dinajpur area was driven back.

On 15 December, the leading column of 71 Brigade reach Darwani railway station. On 16 December, Brig. Shaffi contacted Indian troops and offered to surrender. (Map No. 3)

In November Lt. Gen. Aurora visited Balurghat and issued orders for the capture of Noapara, Morapara and Basudebpur in the Hili, complex of Pakistan ; defences, with 202 Brigade. The Pakistanis had been preparing defences in Hili since many days and had developed it into a strong defensive position. The bunker type of defences were strengthened by use of wire obstacles and mines. The area around Hili had become marshy and cross country movement was difficult even for infantry.

The attack on Hili was planned in 3 phases and, on 23 November, it was attacked by a battalion supported by a squadron of armour. But the operation ended up in dismal failure, because the armour was immobilised by the marshes and failed to support the infantry. Another battalion was thrown into the attack and Noapara fell without much resist-

ance. However, despite continuous effort through the night, Morapara could not be captured. Bhatty then decided to capture Basudebpur with a battalion to secure the western flank of Morapara. Basudebpur fell by first light on 24 November. On 25 November Moropara was captured by a battalion attack.

As a result of this attack the Pakistanis appreciated that the major Indian effort would be a break out to the East along the Hili-Goraghat axis. Therefore, they reinforced the defences around Hili and sealed all exit from it into the waistline, in order to prevent the splitting of their entire force in the North-Western Sector. They also put in a counter-attack on 25 November which, being ill-prepared, was easily beaten back. After this, a stalemate occurred and both sides resorted to heavy shelling, but no major operations were launched in this area till 3 December.

The Command Headquarters, following the bitter struggle for the capture of Hili by a direct attack, decided to switch over to the contingency plan. It was now decided to avoid capturing strongly held defensive positions like Hili and Dinajpur, and to launch a northward thrust to Charkai. The aim of this change of plan was to concentrate a strong force of two Brigades to be launched along the Charkai-Nawabganj-Pirganj and Charkai-Bhaduria-Goraghat axes to cut the waistline at Gaibanda and Gobindganj. These axes, being close to each other, offered the advantage of concentration of armour, artillery and mutual support to the advancing Brigades.

Despite Bhatty's determined efforts to link up with Sharma at Charkai on 3 and 4 December, his leading battalion was held up by stiff opposition at Debkhanda, halfway between Hili and Charkai.

In the meanwhile, 66 Brigade had advanced to Phulbari from Samja and the town was captured on 3 December by a battalion attack. However, the existing bridge over the river was blown up by the retreating Pakistanis. By putting in a major engineering effort, a track was developed to link up Samja with Dinajpur-Phulbari road by the Indian forces and a bridge was constructed over the river near Phulbari.

On 4 December, the advance began, led by an armoured regiment, which surprised the Pakistanis at Charkai by a cross country approach. As the Pakistanis fled, it was discovered that the track linking Phulbari with Charkai, being unsuitable for vehicular traffic, was inadequate for a divisional advance. After a quicker reconnaissance it was decided to convert the railway track into a motorable road from Phulbari to Charkai by the evening of 5 December. Since speed was the key to success of operations in this sector, engineers with working parties from the infantry battalions alongwith local labour collected by the Mukti Bahini put in a Herculean effort. By mid-night of 6/7 December the route was made vehicle-worthy, a remarkable feat which involved constructing a number of bridges.

On 4 December, while the work of connecting the road track was on, the divisional commander decided to concentrate 66 and 202 Brigades in the Charkai and Nawabganj area to make a strong drive towards Pirganj and Goraghat. He also began moving 340 Brigade with nearly two armoured regiments in Nawabganj—Charkai area. While this movement was being carried out, Nawabganj and Dakhbhana were captured. However, by 5 December it became apparent that 202 Brigade was having problems in linking up with 66 Brigade at Charkai, because of difficulties in disengaging itself at Hili due to close contact. It was, therefore, decided to contain Hili with 202 Brigade and advance over the newly constructed track with 340 Brigade on 7 December to capture Pirganj. 67 Brigade was ordered to hold the firm base and the bridge head in the vicinity of Charkai.

The advance of 340 Brigade was delayed by congestion of vehicles at the bridge site. It continued, led by the armour, despite minor opposition. By last light on 7 December the armour captured Pirganj without opposition.

With the capture of Pirganj the Pakistani forces in this sector were cut in two. During the period that followed the Pakistani divisional commander commanded his division from Rangpur, though his tactical headquarters was at Nator. He did not wish to return to his headquarters through an area in

the hands of the Indian forces. Consequently, utter confusion prevailed among his division, and his troops were forced to fight piecemeal actions. He eventually flew out in a helicopter on the night of 9/10 December.

On the night of 7/8 December the Pakistanis endeavoured to recapture Pirganj. But the weak and disjointed attacks were easily repelled by the Indian forces.

Lachhman Singh now decided to revise his plan, in order to destroy all the Pakistani toops in the waistline in one major stroke. The new plan was as follows :—

(a) 202 Brigade to capture Hili and advance eastward to link up with 66 Brigade in the Goraghat area and then advance to Bogra and capture it.

(b) 340 Brigade to advance from Pirganj to capture Gobindganj and then advance along the main road to Bogra and capture it.

(c) 66 Brigade to advance from Nawabganj to capture Bhaduria and advance to Goraghat and Gobindganj to link up with 340 Brigade.

On 9 December, 340 Brigade led by armour advanced and captured Palasbari. Pirganj was held strongly by a battalion, to face a likely attack by the Pakistanis from Rangpur side. Information was also received that the Pakistanis were planning to escape from Rangpur towards Dacca by river using the Phulchari ferry. So two companies were sent to demolish the jetties over the ferry site on priority basis.

The bridge near Gobindganj was blown up by the retreating Pakistanis, who had also mined the road, which delayed the advance of 340 Brigade. On 12 December the armoured regiment grouped with it was moved to the western front.

In the meanwhile 202 Brigades undertook operations to clear the Hili complex. One battalion captured Duria and Barachangram by 10 December. Another battalion captured Bisapara and Baigram the same day. Yet another battalion captured Chandipur, Hakimpur and Denjapara. The Pakistani's

resistance at Hili decreased substantially by 10 December. 202 Brigade then passed into Goraghat, leaving a battalion to contain Hili, and reached it on 11 December. The next day it resumed the advance to Bogra via Khetal.

During this period an adhoc brigade comprised of Mukti Bahini and the BSF under Brig. Prem Singh crossed the Mahananda. It captured Nawabganj on 12 December and dominated the area upto the outskirts of Rajshahi.

On 7 December, 66 Brigade advanced from Nawabganj by a motorable track to Gobindganj. A belated battalion attack was launched on Bhaduria on 10 December. Bhaduria was captured the next day after heavy fighting and 66 Brigade linked up with 202 Brigade in Goraghat area by first light on 12 December.

The divisional advance led by 340 Brigade along the highway began on 9 December. The North bank of Karatoya was cleared by first light of 10 December The Pakistanis were holding the South bank in strength. It was decided to outflank them by a wide eastward hook. On 11 December, the road was cut off in the South of Gobindganj. The Pakistani troops in Gobindganj panicked and fled, and a large number of then were taken prisoners.

The advance was continued without waiting for the construction of the bridge over the Karatoya. By afternoon the Indian troops reached the Ichhamati river, where they were held up by artillery and small arms fire.

A company followed by a battalion crossed the river in the night and put the defenders to flight. The brigade pushed on relentlessly and captured the bridge on Karatoya intact. Bogra was only a few kilometres away now and its defences were contacted on 13 December. A combat group consisting of a regiment less a squadron of armour and a battalion was sent on a wide hook via Gabtali to cut off both roads South of Bogra by first light on 14 December.

On 14 December, 340 Brigade pressed on the attack from the north as well as from the south. The Pakistanis put

up a gallant fight. On the morning of 15 December 205 Brigade Headquarter surrendered to the Indian troops.

In the meanwhile, the division was ordered to capture Rangpur without delay. So 66 Brigade was diverted towards Rangpur and on 14 December 202 Brigade followed it. The defence of Balurghat was taken over by 9 Mountain Brigade under Brig. T. Verma and the Brigade was ordered to concentrate in tbe Bogra area.

On 15 December, 66 Brigade began the advance to Rangpur, but was held up at Ghagat river. 202 was also held up along the river south-west of Rangpur. However, on the morning of 16 December the Pakistanis holding Rangpur surrendered to the Indian forces.

A total of 345 officers, 597 JCOs and 15,443 other ranks and 6000 para-military forces were made prisoners by 33 corps in the North-Western Sector. ●

CHAPTER VI

The South Western Sector

".....What part did 11 Corps operations play in bringing about Niazi's collapse ? According to Niazi himself it was negligible, as these operations neither threatened Dacca nor impaired his fighting capability."

"Perhaps Raina would have earned greater dividends if he had followed the master strategy plan enunciated by Army Headquarters to the letter. This visualised blocking the escape routes at Hardinge Bridge in the North and Khulna in the South first, and then the destruction of the Pakistani Armed Forces deployed in the sector. Instead of making an entry in the centre and then breaking out North and South, Raina after making Ansari concentrate in Jessore, could have converged on the fortress in a pincer movement from North and South after securing the bridge and Khulna."

"That would have ensured the utter destruction of the Pakistani Forces trapped in the sector. Even if Niazi had displayed more toughness than he did and had decided to put up a fight at Dacca, the total destruction of this force would have shortened the War and eroded Niazi's will that much. In this context the corps operation do not seem to have achieved results commensurate with the effort."

—MAJ. GEN. SUKHWANT SINGH

(Deputy Director of Military Operations at Army Headquarters during the war in 1971 in his book 'The Liberation of Bangladesh')

The South Western Sector was bounded by the southern bank of the Ganga in the North and the East, the Bay of Bengal in the South and the Calcutta and Krishnanagar sector of West Bengal in the West. The grain of the land as else-

where in East Pakistan was from North to South. The area South of Jessore was deltaic around Khulna, further South of which lay the Delta of Sunderbans. The entire area was criss-crossed by water channels, rivulets and thick forests. These formed viable obstacles restricting all manoeuvres by armour and infantry. The Ganga which could be crossed by a ferry at the Goalundo Ghat formed a major obstacle in this area for an advance on Dacca.

The most important road in this sector ran North to South connecting Hardinge Bridge, Jhenida, Jessore and Khulna and ran parallel to the Indian border. There were three routes of ingress in this sector. These were as follows :—

(a) **Bangaon-Jessore**. This was the main road and the shortest and most direct approach to Dacca.

(b) **Krishnanagar-Jibannagar-Kalignaj-Jhenida**. This road linked up with the Jessore-Kushtia highway at Kaliganj.

(c) **Meherpur-Chuadanga-Magura**. An East-West road connected Meherpur with Jhenida.

The sector had excellent road communications on the Indian side of the border.

Jessore was the most important town and cantonment in this sector. It was a communications centre from where radiated a network of roads and railways—towards Hardinge Bridge in the North, Dacca in the East, Khulna in the South and Calcutta in the West. It was the focal point of the defences in the sector. Being only 90 kilometers from Calcutta, it posed a major threat to the vital Indian Metropolis and Headquarters of Indian Eastern Command. The capture of Jessore by the Indians on the other hand would be a crushing blow to the Pakistani defences in the sector.

Jhenida, another important communications hub in the northern part of the sector was located at the inter-section of the main highway connecting Jessore and Hardinge Bridge, and Chuadanga to Magura and Goalunda Ghat. Hardinge Bridge being the only land link between the North Western

and South Western Sectors, was of immense tactical importance.

Khulna, in the Southern part of the sector, was the second biggest industrial town in East Pakistan and was linked to the port of Chalna on the Bay of Bengal.

9 Pakistan Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Ansari with his Headquarters at Jessore was responsible for the defence of this sector. Ansari appreciated that the main effort of the Indian forces would be concentrated towards Jessore and Hardinge Bridge and not towards the Golunda Ghat ferry. Accordingly, he deployed his division to defend the important towns of Jessore and Jhenida as follows :

(a) 57 Brigade under Brig. Manzur with its headquarters at Jhenida was in Darsana and the North of it.

(b) 107 Brigade under Brig. Hayat with its Headquarters at Jessore was in Jibannagar and the south of it.

The troops were deployed well forward and Ansari's plan to carry out a fighting withdrawal and make a determined stand at Jessore and Jhenida.

On the Indian side, 2 Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. T.N. Raina, MVC, was responsible for operations in this sector. The planning was carried out with the aim of capturing Jessore at the earliest, so as to split up the Pakistani forces in the sector. Hardinge Bridge was to be captured in the early stages to prevent a union of the Pakistani forces in the North Western and South Western Sectors. The capture of Khulna and Chalna were given due importance.

2 Corps comprised of 4 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. M.S. Barar and 9 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Dalbir Singh, 4 Mountain Division was employed in the northern portion of the Sector. Its tasks were to capture Magura and the ferry sites across the Madhumati and subsequently to capture the Faridpur and Goalunda Ghat ferries or carry out mopping operations in Kushtia and Hardinge Bridge area. The major thrust was to be made against Jessore by 9 infantry Division, which was to capture Jessore, Khulna and also be

prepared to capture Magura or Jhenida in conjunction with 4 Mountain Division.

The area of responsibility of 4 Mountain Division was bounded in the North by the Ganga and in the south by Jibannagar-Kaliganj- Jhendia - Faridpur. The important highway connecting Hardinge Bridge to Jessore through Jhenida and Kushtia ran through this sector. The two important ferries of Faridpur and Goalundo Ghat enroute to Dacca were also located in this sector. Hardinge Bridge designed to take rail and foot traffic, was not decked for vehicular movement, presented a delectable objective. The two major rivers in this sector—the Ganga and the Madhumati—were unbridged and hence presented formidable obstacles. Jhenida and Kushtia were the two important communication centres. Although dotted with lakes, this sector was better suited for mobile operations, than the area South of Jessore.

The Pakistanis had deployed 57 Brigade to defend this sector. The troops were deployed all along the border to deny the likely approaches. The inter-brigade, boundary between 57 and 107 Brigades was along Darsana. Which was inclusive of 57 Brigade, while Jibannagar was inclusive of 107 Brigade. The troops of 107 Brigade were deployed in Jibannagar area with a view to guard the approaches to Hardinge Bridge and the Meherpur Chandanga area.

Barar planned to launch his offensive operations in this sector for the early capture of Jhenida and Magura. He planned to advance on the Uthali-Suadih-Kotchandpur axis with 41 Brigade under Brig. R. Michigan and on the Jibannagar-Kaliganj axis with 62 Brigade under Brig. Rajindernath. After the capture of Kotchandpur 41 Brigade was to approach Jhenida along the Talsar track and 62 Brigade was to advance along the Kaliganj axis.

4 Division had secured the general area of Jibannagar and Uthali by the beginning of December. Barar, who felt that Darsana could interfere with his axis of imaintenance, ordered Brig. Michigan to capture it by 4 December. Since the reconnaissance revealed that the approaches to Darsana from the North East were held strongly by the Pakistanis.

Michigan decided to launch a frontal attack with two battalions. A roadblock in the Loknathpur area to isolate Darsana from Chuadanga was established during the night of 3/4 December. The attack on Darsana was launched immediately after the first light on 4 December and the town was captured by mid-day, after heavy fighting. (See Map No 4)

In the meanwhile, on the Pakistani side, Brig. Manzur Ahmed appreciated that the fall of Darsana would endanger the safety of Chuadanga, the home town of Governor Malik. He therefore moved his tactical headquarters from Jhenida to Chuadanga on 3 December. After the capture of Darsana, he ordered his troops to fall back on Chuadanga for its defence. However, Michigan concentrated 41 Brigade in Uthali area, leaving a battalion at Darsana. and continued advancing towards Katchandpur, bypassing Chuadanga. 62 Brig. after capturing Jibannagar, advanced toward Kotchandpur which was captured on 5 December. By the morning of 7 December 62 Brigade captured Kaliganj. It was then ordered to link up with 41 Brigade at Jhenida, advance towards Magura and capture it at the earliest. On the evening of 8 December, it captured Magura.

Raina then released 7 Brigade under Brig. Zail Singh which was a part of 4 Division and was held back as corps reserve. The brigade concentrated in Jhenida by midnight of 8 December and advanced on the Jhenida-Kushtia axis to capture Kushtia and Hardinge Bridge at the earliest. Zail Singh was told that the Pakistanis were in a state of confusion and that Kushtia was lightly held.

On the Pakistani side, Manzur Ahmed had concentrated his brigade in Chuadanga by 6 December. He moved to Kushtia on the night of 7/8 December with a view to rejoining 9 Pakistan Division by using Kushtia-Faridpur rail-link. But he was compelled to await further developments as the rail bridges on this line had been blown-up by the IAF.

On the morning of 9 December, a battalion of 7 Brigade led by armour commenced advancing towards Kushtia from Jhenida. As the leading tanks approached the outskirts of the town, Raina and Barar landed in the middle of the battalion

in a helicopter. The Corps Commander exhorted the battalion to speed up the capture of Kushtia saying that the Pakistanis were on the run everywhere. Spurred by the incentive to win laurels, the battalion entered the town throwing caution to the wind. The Pakistanis kept lying low till the leading troops reached the centre of the town, and then opened up with every thing they had. The vanguard company fell back and Zail Singh had to take charge of the situation. The battalion was extricated with the help of artillery fire. By evening the barigade was deployed along the canal, which ran South of the town. The Pakistanis did not try to pursue the retreating Indian troops.

It was now decided to put in a divisional attack to clear up Kushtia and the area upto Hardinge Bridge. Barar concentrated his division South of Kushtia on the night of 9/10 December, leaving just one Battalion on the Madhumati to maintain a show of force there. The attack on Kushtia was led by 41 and 7 Brigades on 11 December. The Pakistanis pulled out of the town. By evening Kushtia was cleared and 41 Brigade commenced advancing towards Hardinge Bridge. The bridge, however, was blown up by the retreating Pakistanis The same day the Brigade could secure the South bank.

On 12 December, Barar ordered the Division less 41 Brigade to move back to Magura area, where a battalion was facing an adhoc Pakistani Brigade across the river since 9 December. The concentration of 62 and 7 Brigades was completed by 14 December.

The Pakistani positions extended along the East bank of the river from Duman in the North to Komarpur in the South. Barar decided to attack by crossing the rever in the North and the South simultaneously. 62 Brigade crossed the river—some 400 metres wide and 3 metres deep—in local boats, opposite Duman on the night of 14/15 December, cleared the opposition upto Magura-Faridpur road and secured the Kamarkhali ferry by first light on 16 December. 7 Brigade crossed the river the same night in the South in the Harinadanga area to contain the Pakistanis South of the road. Komarpur was occupied by first light without opposition and the railway embankment near Gopaldi was secured.

Barar than ordered both brigades to establish blocks East of the Pakistani positions to cut off their escape routes. The Pakistanis shelled the blocks and the exchange of artillery fire continued throughout the day. In the evening the Pakistanis tried to attack the block established by 7 Brigade but the attack was repulsed inflicting heavy casualties.

About midday on 16 December, the Pakistanis offered to surrender. Ansari was taken prisoner alongwith some 3,000 troops.

In the meanwhile, 9 Infantry Divison was conducting operations in the Jessore sector. The general line North of Bagdaha, Chaugacha and Jessore, all inclusive to 9 Infantry Division formed the inter-Divisional boundary between 4 and 9 Divisions. The grain of the terrain in this sector is from North to South and the area along the border is interspersed with numerous lakes. South of Jessore towards Khulna, the area is marshy and full of thick growth, before merging in the mangrove areas of Sunderbans. (Map No 5)

The main highway from Calcutta via Bangaon formed the shortest and direct route to Jessore. However, it involved a number of water crossings over the Betna, Kabadak and Harihar rivers and was the most obvious approach. A North-South track cut this road at Jhingergacha and linked it with Bayra in the North and Gobardanga in the South on the other side, involvingferry crossing in the North as well as South of Jhingergacha. A track ran from Bayra to Garibpur and Abdulpur, linking the main Jhenida-Jessore highway. Another track linked with Khulna via Satkhira but Calcutta involved crossing ferries over many rivers. A road linked Jessore to Chaugacha, which was connected to Bagdaha on the Indian side. On the Indian side, there were good roads upto the border at Bagdaha, Bayra, Bangaon and Gobardanga.

The Kabadak river runs almost parallel to the internationl boundary and Bhairab, the other important river in this sector, runs in the East of Jessore in the North-South direction. Betna, Harihar and Harin are the other rivers in this sector, The main highway and railway from Jhenida to

Jessore, Sirmani and Khulna runs parallel to the Bairab river on its West bank

The Bayra-Garibpur-Afra approach offered a number of advantages for an advance towards Jessore, but involved bridging the Kabadak. The river formed the international boundary near Bayra and was lightly held by the Pakistanis. There were no other water obstacles on this approach to Jessore, and an advance along this axis would have a secure northern flank because of the alignment of the Bairab. It could also isolate the Pakistanis in Chaugacha from their forces in Jessore. It was closer to the axis of advance of 4 Division in the North and thus offered excellent mutual support and co-ordination between the two divisions. It also posed a threat to the road communications from Jessore to Jhenida and Magura, which could isolate Jessore from Dacca and Jhenida.

Jessore was the most prized objective in this area and 107 Brigade under Brig. Malik Hayat Khan was responsible for the sector from Jibannagar to Satkhira. The brigade was deployed well forward to cover the Bayra, Chaugacha and Jhingergacha axis. The plan was to carry out a fighting withdrawal to Jessore, where the final battle would be fought.

The tasks allotted to 9 Infantry division for its offensive operations in this sector were to capture Jessore and then Khulna with a brigade group. It was also to be prepared to capture Jhenida and Magura, in conjunction with 4 Mountain Division, by division less a brigade, and also be prepared to secure ferries in Goalundo Ghat area.

Dalbir Singh planned to advance along the main highway from Bangaon, with the Brigade from Bayra and another from Gobardanga hitting the Pakistanis at Jhingargacha from the rear. The Pakistani forces along the Bangaon axis were to be cut off by out-flanking moves and Jessore was to be captured before the Pakistanis could reorganise to strengthen the defences there.

The operations in this sector began towards the middle of November with a number of minor actions around the

Bayra bulge. On 20 November Dalbir Singh ordered 42 Brigade under Brig. J.S. Gharaya to secure Garibpur at night. so that the Chaugacha-Afra road could be dominated and cut if required. A battalion crossed the Kabadak in assault boats by afternoon, and by evening the engineers threw a bridge across the river. The battalion was deployed along the Garibpur-Jaganathpur track.

Hayat, receiving information that a large number of Mukti Bahini were digging in the Garibpur area, ordered to clear the force straight-away. Two task forces comprised of two companies each supported by armour, were to eliminate the encroachment—one attacked from the direction of Chaugacha while the other from Jessore area from Afra by first light. However, both the attacks were repulsed by the Indian forces inflicting heavy casualties on Pakistani tanks and men. The battle resulted in laying the road to Jessore open to the Indian force and the Pakistanis were left without armour.

The Pakistanis worked feverishly to strengthen their positions around Afra area. A battalion was flown in from Rajshahi to Jessore and troops along the Chaugacha axis were reinforced. The interbrigade boundary was readjusted and Hayat Khan was made responsible for the defence of the sector from Arpara in the North to Satkira in the South. The Pakistanis fell back to the general line of Afra-Jhingergacha. Manoeuvrability in the area was greatly restricted because it was waterlogged and was full of marshes. The Pakistanis used it to their advantage by using thousands of villagers to dig anti-tank ditches and laying minefields to cover the few approaches that were available for movement.

By the end of November, Dalbir had concentrated his division less a brigade at Bayra, while a brigade was at Bangaon. He revised his original plan and decided to push the Pakistanis back on the northern and central approaches to Jessore.

42 Brigade advanced from Bayra to Arpara, but was held up against Arpara, and Durgabarkati by 4 December. 350 Brigade under Brig. H.S. Sandhu was also held up against Burinda, but cleared it by 5 December.

Realising that a breakthrough on the central approach would be expensive in terms of time and men, Dalbir now swung the full weight of his thrust onto the northern approach. Leaving a battalion to guard the Bangaon axis, he concentrated 32 Brigade under Brig. Tewari around Bayra. 42 Brigade was ordered to clear Durgabarkati and a passage was cleared there for the brigade through a battalion attack on 6 December. With this, the route for the dash to Jessore was opened up. 32 Brigade, which was following 42 Brigade, now pushed forward and by last light, the armour cut the Jessore-Chaugacha road near Abdulpur.

The next morning 32 Brigade advanced from Abdulpur to take the Pakistani forces holding Afra from the rear. The Pakistani forces withdrew from Afra, blowing up the bridge across the nulla in Afra village, which was reconstructed immediately by the Indian forces. The stage was now set for the dash to Jessore.

On 7 December, 32 Brigade advanced and secured Jessore cantonment by midday. 350 Brigade pressed on to Jessore along the Jhingergacha axis on the Southern flank, and the town fell without resistance the same day.

On the Pakistani side, as the pressure around Arpara and Burinda increased on 4 and 5 December, Hayat sought the permission from Ansari to fall back on to Jessore, who ordered him to hold on. On 6 December, Hayat, on receiving the news of the breakthrough at Durgabarkati, withdrew his brigade to Khulna. As a result, the routes from Jessore to Jhenida and Magura lay open to the Indian forces as 4 Division had captured Jhenida and Magura on 7 and 8 December. 9 Pakistani Division was split into two with a big gap in the centre and the route to Dacca lay open for a quick advance. However, 2 Corps failed to seize the opportunity by directing both the divisions for a drive towards Goalundo Ghat en route to Dacca.

Dalbir pushed 32 Brigade towards Khulna and concentrated rest of his division around Jessore. 32 Brigade advanced clearing the Pakistani delaying positions enroute by

out flanking moves. However, these tactics resulted in considerable delay in the advance, because the area was marshy and restricted manoeuvrability, especially of armour. Ramnagar, Phultala, Gilatala were cleared by 12 December, and the advancing Indian columns reached in the vicinity of Daulatpur area.

The Pakistanis held Daulatpur with about a brigade strength. The area favoured the defenders, being thickly wooded, restricting movement of the attackers. The Bhairab on the East of the main road and the extensive marshes on the Western side of Daulatpur were major obstacles.

On 12 December, Dalbir decided to move forward the balance of his division for the impending attack on Daulatpur. His plan was as follows :—

(a) 32 Brigade to hold firm base astride the main road.

(b) 350 Brigade to attack from North and overrun the main Pakistani position in conjunction with 42 Brigade.

(c) 42 Brigade to secure Syamganj ferry and cross the Bhairab with brigade less a battalion. The brigade was to advance South along the East bank of the river, recross it between Daulatpur and Khulna and capture Khulna in conjunction with 350 Brigade.

42 Brigade moved forward in the afternoon of 12 December and secured the Syamganj ferry by 13 December, in face of heavy opposition. However, the brigade then moved further North and crossed the river at Barakpur on the night of 13/14 December, but it could not reach the point from where it had to recross the Bhairab in time.

On 14 December, 350 Brigade launched an attack on Daulatpur, without waiting for 42 Brigade. Syamganj fell on 15 December and Sirmani the next day. On 17 December, Hayat surrendered with nearly 3700 Pakistani troops.

CHAPTER VII

The Northern Sector

Dear Brigadier,

Hoping this finds you in high spirits. Thanks for the letter.

We here in Jamalpur are waiting for the fight to commence. It has not started yet. So let us not talk and start it.

40 sorties I may point out, are inadequate. Please ask for many more.

Your remark about your messenger being given proper treatment was superfluous, shows how you under-estimate my boys. I hope he liked his tea. Give my love to the Muktis.

Hoping to find you with a sten in your hand next time instead of the pen you seem to have so much mastery over.

I am your must sincerely,

Commander Jamalpur Fortress

(Brigadier Kler, on 9 December 1971, sent a note through a Mukti Bahini messenger to Lt. Col. Sultan Ahmed, a highly decorated officer of the Pakistani Army and commander of the Jamalpur Fortress, threatening him with intense artillery and aerial punishment if he did not surrender. This letter was sent by Sultan Ahmed as a reply to Kler alongwith one 7-62 mm Chinese make bullet. He was later taken a prisoner on the last day of the war).

The Northern Sector lies South of the Indian state of Meghalaya and resembles an inverted triangle, with its base in

the North along the international border, with Jamuna and Meghna forming its western and eastern side. Dacca, the capital and the political and psychological nerve-centre of East Pakistan, was located at the apex of the triangle in the South. Although the Eastern Sector provided the shortest approach to Dacca, the most suitable axis for an advance into the heart of East Pakistan lay in Northern Sector, due to the nature of the terrain, which presented very few water obstacles.

This sector consisted of the districts of Myamensingh, Tangail and Dacca, with the Brahmaputra, a local river, dissecting it into two distinct regions. The river runs across the sector diagonally from North-West to South East, is known as the Banar in its Southern reaches and later Lakhya in the East of Dacca. The region East of the river is low-lying and has numerous water obstacles, while the region West of it is much higher, especially from South of Myamensing to East of Tangail. The Madhupur jungles, interspersed with hills, extend from Myamensingh in the North to Kaliakar in the South, and provided an excellent sanctuary for the Mukti Bahini. The western region was the best approach for an advance on to Dacca and hence was of great tactical significant.

The Jamuna which formed the western boundary of this sector could be crossed from the Northwestern Sector at Phulchari, Siraganj and Bera ferries and from the Southwestern Sector at Faridpur and Goalundo Ghat. The Meghna, which bounded the sector in the East, could be crossed at Bhairab Bazar, Dankandi and Chandpur ferries. The bridge at Ashuganj over the Brahamputra, over which passed the railway connecting Chittangong with Dacca, formed the only land-link between the Eastern and Northern Sectors. Another railway linked Dacca with Myamensingh and Jamalpur along the South of the Brahamputra.

As in case of the railways, the road communications in the sector conformed the North-South grain of the country. The main road from the Indian border to Dacca ran through Kamalpur, Bakshiganj, Sherpur Jamalpur, Myamensingh, Madhupur, Tangail and Kaliakar. Dacca lies approximately 200 Kilometres from the Indian border and although there are

no bridges over the Brahmputra it can be crossed over the ferrises at Jamalpur and Myamensingh. The other important road in this sector ran from Haluaghat in the eastern region to Myamensingh across the Brahmaputra, which can be crossed by a ferry, and then joined the main road at Madhupur. The minor rivers, Lohajang and Turrang, were bridged at Poongli in the North of Tangail at Kasimpur in the North West of Dacca, respectively. (Map No. 6)

Myamensingh was the main town in this area and Tangail was the next important town and communicatian centre. Dacca, with its all-weather air-field at Tejgaon, could be approached from Kaliakar along the following axes : —

(a) Kaliakar—Chanda—Tungi—Dacca.

(b) Kaliakar—Dhamrai—Sabhar—Mirpur—Dacca.

On the Indian side, the road communications in Meghalaya were limited. Tura was the main communication centre, from where two roads led to the border at Kamalpur and opposite Haluaghat. Gauhati, the main railhead in Assam, was connected with one battalion to Tura by a good road. Gauhati, with its rail-links and airfield, formed an important administrative base, which could provide excellent support to any operations in the Northern Sector.

The Pakistanis had anticipated a minor thrust from the Indians in this sector and as a consequence held it weekly. 93 Brigade under Brig Kader with its head-quarters at Myamen Singh was reponsible for the defence of the sector. The brigade comprised of only two regular battalions, with one battalion guarding the Kamalpur-Sherpur axis and the other the Haluaghat-Myamensingh area. There was no Pakistani armour in this sector and the other supporting complements were also inadequate.

As appreciated by the Pakistanis, the Indians had allotted very limited resources in this sector. 101 Communications Zone Area under Maj. Gen. Gurbax Singh. Gill was responsible for the operations in the sector. He came under direct control of the Army Commander. His tactical headquarters was organised

on an adhoc basis from the existing staff of the Communication Zone Headquarters, which was actually responsible for the administrative support of Indian troops located in the country's eastern region. Also allocatted to Gill were 95 Mountain Brigade under Brig. H.S. Kler and FJ Sector under Brig. Santa Singh, MVC, for the operations. Santa Singh had inadequate staff and signal communications. and almost no administrative units under him. His command comprised of just one regular battalion, a BSF battalion and elements of Mukti Bahini. There was no Indian armour in the sector. However, the tasks allotted to Gill were to capture Kamalpur, Jamalpur and Tangail and eventually contact Dacca by D plus 12/13.

Gill planned the main thrust by 95 Brigade along Kamalpur Jamalpur axis. A subsidiary thrust was to be launched FJ Sactor along the Haluaghat-Myamensing axis. Thus Gill's plan entailed containment of the Pakistani forces, along the Myamensingh axis by a show of force, and overwhelm them along the Jamalpur axis employing a full brigade. After capturing Jamalpur, he envisaged pushing on to Tangail to cut off the Pakistani forces at Myamensingh, thus destroying them in piecemeal. To substantiate his effort Aurora agreed to arrange the parachute drop of a battalion to secure the bridge on the Lohaganj river, North of Tangail and estallsh a road-block there.

The operations commenced in late November with 95 Brigade attempting to capture Kamalpur. On 3 December, the town was surrounded by a battalion and the next day it was punished with a heavy artillery and aerial bombardment. In the evening the Pakistani forces surrendered as no reinforcements arrived to strengthen the garrison.

While the battle of Kamalpur was in full rage on 4 Decmber, another, Indian battalion contacted the defences of Bakshiganj which was located further south at the junction of Kamalpur-Jamalpur and Kamalpur-Sherpur roads. A roadblock was established by Mukti Bahini in the south of Bakhsisganj, while continuous pressure was exerted from the North and the East. On the morning of 5 December, Kler learnt, that the Pakistani garrison had slipped out during

the night through the gaps in the roadblocks. Gill arrived in the location and drove in Bakshiganj with Kler to assess the situation for himself. The jeep carrying the two commanders ran over an anti-tank mine and Gill was seriously injured, while Kler escaped unhurt. Gill was immediately evacuated to the military hospital in Gauhati and Maj. Gen. G.C. Nagra, commanding 2 Division was appointed in his stead.

On 6 December, after having been apprised of the over all situation by Gill at the hospital, Nagra conferred with Kler and Santa Singh. He then submitted his assessment to Eastern Command and put in a bid for more resources which included an additional brigade and armour, artilerry and signals components. He explained the possibility of contacting the defences at Dacca earlier than planned initially by mobile operations. He also made arrangements for some of the staff officers from his divisional headquarters to join him and tied up the administrative details so as to enable his brigade commanders to concentrate on the operations without having to look over their shoulders.

Although Bakhsiganj was captured by first light on 6 December, the advance further South was delayed till the next morning, because the infantry had to wait for its transport and heavy equipment to come ap. A brigadge some six kilometres South of the village, was blown up by the retreating Pakistani troops and had to be reconstructed. By last light on 7 December, the advancing troops reached the northern bank of the Brahamputra.

Jamalpur, on the South bank of the river, was held by the Paksitanis with approximately a battalion. Nagra planned to keep a battalion on the northern bank, while crossing the river with two battalions in local boats at Shyampur in the West of Jamalpur. The plan was aimed at blocking the escape route of the Pakistani troops southward towards Dacca and destroy them around Jamalpur itself.

The crossing began at last light on 7 December without any opposition. Once again the heavy weapons and equipment did not fetch up and the battalion had to stay in the

harbour the next day, after having crossed the river. After the last light on 8 December, the battalion moved on a wide hook and by next morning established a road-block Sou th of Jamalpur. By now the other battalion had crossed the river. Kler, too, arrived on the South bank and stayed put to control the operations. Nagra decided to move another battalion across the river and capture Jamalpur after having invested it from all sides. Jamalpur was subject to intense, artillery and air bombardment on 8 December. On 9 December, Kler sent a note through a Mukti Bahini messenger to the garrison commander, a highly decorated officer who sent a stern reply challenging Kler for a "shodown" at Jamalpur.

At last light on 9 December, the roadblocks moved closer to Jamalpur. One battalion astride the main road and the other on the road leading South east from Jamalpur towards Myamensingh. The Pakistanis, in the meanwhile, strengthened their defences to guard their flanks and rear, thinning out from the river bank. On 8 December, Eastern Command allotted 167 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Irani to Nagra ordered Irani to contact him immediately at his headquarters at Sherpur with one battalion for supporting the operations in the South of Jamalpur. On 10 December, this battalion arrived at Sherpur and soon crossed the river, and was deployed on the South West of Jamalpur, completing its investment on the night of 10/11 December.

The exchange of artillery and infantry mortars fire throughout this period. Kler appreciated that the Pakistanis were preparing to breakout through the cordon during the night. He, therefore, decided not to attack the Pakistani positions, thus avoiding casualities to own troops, but to wait for the enemy to move into the trap set by him. As expected, the Pakistanis started acting during the night of 10/11 December and launched a series of attacks on the Indian roadblocks. Confused fighting ensued astride the main road and the other Indian battalions moved closer to relieve the pressure in this area. Sudden calm followed in the morning and the Pakistani garrison surrendered. The garrison commander however, had escaped during the night with a few of of his troops.

By now, Niazi had realised the perilousness of the overall situation and the imminent danger to Dacca. He hastily, tried to summon troops from 14 and 16 Divisions for strengthening the defences of the city on night of 9/10 December. Both Kazi Mujid and Nazar Hussain expressed their inability to act on the orders and, by the morning of 10 December, Dacca was plunged into an atmosphere of gloom and despair. Maj. Gen. Jamsed, who was responsible for the defence of Dacca ordered Kader, who was under his command, on 10 December to vacate Jamalpur and Myamensingh and fall back on Kaliakar, to deny the northern approach to the capital, However, the Pakistanis had not envisaged such a withdrawal in their earlier plans, which together with the investment of Jamalpur by the Indian forces more or less decided the fate of Kader's brigade. With the fall of Jamalpur, the road to Dacca lay open for a rapid Indian advance.

In simultaneity with operations around Jamalpur, Santa Singh undertook to capture Myamensingh from the direction of Haluaghat. Kader had appreciated that the main Indian thrust would develop in this area and had deployed a battalion to counter it. Santa Singh had planned to make a show of force by a BSF advance on the Baghmara-Myamensingh axis : while using the regular battalion to attack Haluaghat from the South and also capture Sarcharpur, in conjunction with the Mukti Bahini.

On the night of 5/6 December, Haluaghat was attacked from the South East. On 6 December, it was attacked by air and the Pakistanis slipped out during the night of 6/7 December. Another attack was launched on Sarcharpur on the night of 5/6 December, but the Indian forces failed to capture it. After the fall of Haluaghat the Indian troops from that area threatened Sarcharpur from South East by lalst light of 7 December. Phulpur in the South was also attacked and the Pakistanis were forced to vacate Sarcharpur by first light on 9 December.

Santa Singh resumed the advance immediately and occupied Myamensingh, which the Pakistanis had abandoned, by the morning of 11 December. By 12 December Madhupur was captured without opposition.

At this stage, as placed earlier, a parachute battalion was dropped in the vicinity of Tangail. The task given to the battalion was to capture Poongli Bridge over the Lohaganj in tact, and to destroy the withdrawing Pakistani forces of the garrisons of Jamalpur and Myamensingh. After the fall of these garrisons on the morning of 11 December, the drop was carried out and the bridge was captured in the night. The withdrawing Pakistani forces contacted the paratroopers later that night and suffered heavy casualties. However, the main Pakistani force had withdrawn earlier, and thus evaded the trap. The reluctance on the part of the IAF for changing the plan at the last moment by carrying out a drop further South was the main reason for this partial failure.

Kader was at Tangail while the paradrop was being carried out. He decided to withdraw further South towards Kaliakar on foot, because of the fear of minefields on the road. He reached Kaliakar three days later, only to be taken prisoner by the Indian troops, who had reached there earlier. Kler advanced from Jamalpur before daylight on 12 December and linked up with the Indian troops by noon. That evening the advancing elements joined the paratroopers and by last light Tangail fell without opposition.

By now, the leading elements of 4 Corps had reached Lakhya, the last obstacle before Dacca, which was only 10 Kilometre from it. Nagra was still far away from the capital, the distance between Dacca and Tangail being almost 100 kilometers. He was facing difficulties because his administrative echelons and transport had not yet fetched up. The Pakistani forces were in a state of complete disorder and confusion. There was no command and control, transport, supplies and ammunition. The disintegration had already commenced.

Nagra decided on a bold action to destroy the Pakistani forces withdrawing towards Dacca by a relentless pursuit. He arranged for landing supplies by air on a quickly repaired landing ground near Tangail and ordered Kler to push to Kaliakar. By noon of 13 December, Kaliakar was captured after a skirmish. By the morning of 14 December, the lead-

ing elements of the Indian forces reached Turag after advancing throughout the night. Kader was taken prisoner.

The Pakistanis held the eastern bank of Turag in strength. The IAF remained active in this area throughout the day. In the evening, the Indian troops crossed the river but were forced to re-cross it in face of heavy Pakistani opposition.

At midnight on 14 December, 95 Brigade had reached the Turag, FJ Sector was in Safipur area, and 167 Brigade and the parachute battalion were in Tangail area. None of the Indian administrative elements had crossed the Brahmaputra.

In the meanwhile, the leading troops of 57 Division crossed the Lakhya on 14 December and Indian artillery shelled Dacca for the first time. Nagra has reached within striking distance of the city from the North. Eastern Command, at this stage, promised to re-inforce him within 340 Brigade Group.

The ring was closing in and the battle for Dacca was about to begin.

CHAPTER VIII

The Eastern Sector

"Both Sagat Singh and Gonsalves were convinced that no advantage would accrue from the capture of Bhairab Bazar, particularly as it was not linked with Dacca by road. They agreed it would be better to contain the enemy at Bhairab Bazar and effect a crossing farther South, where no opposition was expected. It was here that Sagat Singh exhibited the genius and initiative of a field commander. It was this decision which finally and decisively tilted the scale in our favour and led to the early surrender of the Pakistani forces at Dacca. He acted very boldly when he decided to make the fullest use of the few helicopters available to him to cross the Meghna. He felt that the element of surprise would be so great that the enemy commanders would be paralysed by it. There was no road from Bhairab Bazar to Raipura and Narsingdi and so it was not possible for the enemy to react in strength or in time against our troops, once they landed in that area. Before the enemy could muster strength Sagat Singh and Gonsalves were confident of building up a major force to defeat any enemy counter-attack launched in a hurry. In addition they selected an area deep behind the enemy from where Gonsalves could advance boldly to threaten the weekly held capital of Dacca without fear of a serious counter-action from the feeble and disorganised enemy forces West of the Meghna. Sagat Singh intended to give no opportunity to the enemy to recover by a quick advance to Dacca itself. He was taking the bit in his teeth and acting boldly to reach Daccca irrespective of happenings in his rear or on his flanks. The chances of success lay in boldness, initiative and paralysing the enemy by the speed of the advance. This was a great feat of strategic manoeuvre, and its boldness produced a stunning effect on the already demoralised enemy."

—MAJ GEN. LACHMAN SINGH ; PVSM, MVC
(In his book "Victory in Bangladesh")

SECTION I

General

The Eastern Sector of East Pakistan extended from Sylhet in the North to the South of Cox's Bazar. It was bounded by Meghalaya in the North, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram in the East, the Bay of Bengal in the South and the Meghna river in the West. The grain of the country is from North to South, except around Sylhet, where it slopes westwards from the hills of Mizoram to the Meghna.

The central belt of Comilla and Agartala provides the shortest approach to Dacca from the Indian territory, Agartala being 70 kilometres away from the capital. The sector comprised of the districts of Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Chittagong. The numerous rivers and nullas, except in the Chittagong Hill Tracks and the Lalmai Hills East of Comilla.

The Meghna river a major obstacle for an advance towards Dacca, was nearly three kilometres wide. Approaches to Dacca across the river were through the wayside ports of Chandpur and Daudkandi and over the only bridge at Ashuganj. On the western bank of Meghna lay the town of Bhairab Bazar, which was connected with Dacca by rail. The road system serving the capital emanated from Narsingdi. West of Narsingdi lay the local Brahmaputra bridged for road traffic. The last obstacle on the way to Dacca was the Lakhya, which lay further West and had no bridges, but could be crossed at a number of ferries, especially in the area around Demra.

The ports of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were the main outlets to the sea and were connected by roads and railways with most important centres of habitation in this sector. The main railway ran close to the international border from Chittagong north-wards through Comilla and Latu, to the Indian town of Silchar. A road, which ran almost parallel to the railway, ran from Chittagong to Kasba, from where it entered the Indian territory near Agartala. It re-entered East Pakistan South of Habibganj and once again crossed over to India near Karimganj.

Three important East-West roads emanated from Comilla on the main north-south highway linking up the town with Daudkandi, Chandpur via Lalmai and Ashuganj via Kasba. In the North Sylhet was connected with the Indian towns of Shillong in the North, Silchar in the East and Agartala in the South. Comilla was thus the centre of internal communications in this sector.

Chittagong and Comilla were linked with Chandpur by rail. Another railway linked Akhaura with Bhairab Bazar via the Ashuganj Bridge, forming the only land-link between Dacca and the Eastern Sector. There were important airfields at Chittagong Comilla and Samshernagar. The Meghna was navigable throughout. Chandpur was a major port while Daudkandi and Bhairab Bazar were small wayside ports for Dacca. On the Indian side, there was a railway linking Dharamnagar with Gauhati via Lumding. A road-net was developed upto Sonamura opposite Comilla and linked border points like Sonamura, Agartala, Kailashahar, Karimaganj and Silchar with Shillong. The only airfield on the Indian side was located at Agartala. It was some 1,000 metres from the border and under close observation of the Pakistanis in the Akhaura area.

The road connecting Comilla with Agartala ran parallel to the railway line upto Kasba, from where it bifurcated to Agartala across the border. Another road joined Kasba with Brahmanbaria over the Titas river. Thus Agartala had no road connection with Brahmanbaria except through Kasba. It was appreciated that the Pakistanis would slow down the rate of Indian advance by blowing up the rail and road bridges over Titas. Ashuganj bridge, which was some 30 kilometres from Agartala, was the nearest point to reach Meghna—from the Indian border. The Agartata-Ashuganj approach had more natural obstacles than from Comilla to Daudkandi and Chandpur. In addition the ferries on the opposite banks of these wayside ports were linked with Dacca by road. The latter axis presented to the Indians a bigger slice of the Pakistani territory and also the opportunity of completely isolating Dacca from Chittagong and thus West Pakistan.

Akhaura was a potential threat to the town of Agartala

and its airfield. It was an important railway junction and was linked up with Comilla, Kulaura and Ashuganj. A road bridge at Ujanisar South West of Akhaura permitted vehicular traffic from Kasba to Brahmanbaria. Comilla, a principal communications centre, blocked the approaches to Daudkandi and Chandpur. It also had an important airfield. Although the Lalmai Hills dominated all the major approaches to Daudkandi and Chandpur, they could be by passed along tracks via Burichang in the North and Baghmara in the South.

On the Indian side, Agartala was connected with Silchar in the North and Sonamura in the South by good roads.

This sector was of great tactical significance, for it offered the shortest approach to Dacca. The central area around Comilla and Agartala bulged towards the Meghna, presenting the opportunity for the advancing troops to destroy the defenders in detail by crushing them against the river. However, this sector also presented immense problems in bringing up forces and supplies, due to difficult terrain and paucity of communications on the Indian side.

The Pakistanis had planned to defend this sector with two divisions with their headquarters at Chandpur and Ashuganj. In order to deceive the Indian intelligence they resorted to raise adhoc formations of para-military forces giving them names of regular units. They had a total of some 14 infantry battalions, supported by armour and the para-military forces. 14 Pakistani Division comprised of two brigades was deployed in the Sylhet Sector and had its headquarters at Ashuganj, 39 Pakistani Division was deployed around Maynamati and Feni and had its headquarters at Chandpur. It had seven battalions and a squadron of armour. The Chittagong area was held by an adhoc brigade consisting of two battalions and rangers.

On the Indian side, 4 Corps under Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh was responsible for offensive operations in this sector. He had moved his headquarters to Teliamura, East of Agartala, to be near the area of operational responsibility. 4 Corps comprised of 8 mountain Division of two Brigades, 57 Mountain Divi-

sion, 23 Mountain Division, Kilo sector, seven EBR battalions, some para-military forces and Mukti Bahini elements.

Keeping in view the ground configuration and availability of Communications, 4 Corps was given the responsibility to clear the Eastern Sector upto the Meghna River. The details of tasks allotted to the various divisions were as follows :—

(a) 8 Mountain Division to contain Charkai and Shamshernagar airfield and then secure ferries at Sadipur and Sherpur. It was to capture Sylhet, if opportunities permitted, and then Brahmanbaria. 61 Mountain Brigade of 57 Mountain Division was to operate initially under Headquarters 4 Corps with the following tasks :

(i) To cut Maynamati—Daudkandi road and isolate Maynamati from the North and the West.

(ii) To establish a firm base for 57 Division operations for the Daudkandi area.

(b) 57 Mountain Division to capture Akhaura area and contain the Pakistani forces in Brahmanbaria area. It was then to build up in Maynamati area and capture Daudkandi, and later Chittagong.

(c) 23 Mountain Division to capture the southern portion of the Lalmai Hills and contain the Pakistani forces in Lalmai and Maynamati defences. It was then to capture Chandpur eliminating the remnants of Pakistani forces from the Lalmai Hills.

(d) Kilo Sector to capture Feni and press towards Chittagong.

Thus the pivotal area of operations of 4 Corps was in the centre of the Eastern Sector around Akhaura, Comilla, Daudkandi and Chandpur.

SECTION II

The Sylhet Sector

8 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. Krishna Rao, the present Chief of the Army Staff, was responsible for the conduct

of operations in the Sylhet Sector. Out of its forces in Nagaland, two brigades were grouped under the divisional headquarters. This offensive component was thus unsuitable for operations against a well organised enemy due to its specialised role counter-insurgency operations. The division was also allotted an EB Brigade under Col. Ziaur Rahman. The brigade comprised of two EBR battalions. In the initital stages of concentration the division was addressed as Rear Headquarters 57 Mountain Division, for security cover.

Sylhet was the northeasternmost district of East Pakistan contiguous to the Indian State of Meghalaya in the North and Assam and Tripura in the East. Bounded on the North and the East by hills, the grain of the terrain is from East to West in the northern portion. and North to South in the southern lowlying plain, covered with rivulets, nullas and lakes. A most distinctive feature of this area is its heavy rainfall which is as high as 550 centimetres. The Surma and the Kusiyara, which bifurcate from the Barrak river at Bhanga East of Sylhet on the Indian border are the two major rivers in this region. They are navigable throughout their length and permit easy movement from Sylhet to Ashuganj and then to Dacca.

The railway from Chittagong to Sylhet ran along the border upto Kulaura, from where it branched off to Sylhet, while the main line ran parallel to the border upto Latu. There was also a road running parallel to the border upto Latu. On the Indian side, rail communications existed from Silchar to Dharmanagar, and the road system stretched upto Sonamura in Tripura. Being very close to the International border, all road and rail communications in the Indian territories were vulnerable to Pakistani discruption in this sector. The presence of Pakistani forces around Sylhet posed a direct threat to the communications in the rear of 4 corps.

The important towns in this sector, apart from Sylhet, Fenchuganj, Maulvi Bazar, Kulaura and Shamshernagar, Sylhet itself is located on the North bank of the Surma, was a district headquarters and hub of communications, with road links with Jaintiapur, Charkai, Fenchuganj and Maulvi Bazar. It also had an all-weather airfield, which added to its tactical importance.

Maulvi Bazar and Kulaura were the other delectable military objectives in this sector, being nodal points of communications.

The following were the important roads in the Sylhet Sector :—

(a) Sylhet—Jaintiapur in the North on the border and onwards to Shillong.

(b) Sylhet—Charkai—Karimganj in the East. There were two ferries on the road. One was at Sylhet itself and the other at the Kusiyara East of Charkai.

(c) Sylhet—Kulaura—Fenchuganj in the South-East—Dharmanagar across the border. This road was in poor condition and unable to support any major operations logistically.

(d) Sylhet—Maulvi Bazar—Shamshernagar further South West—Kailashahar across the border. It involves crossing ferries at Manu in the Indian territory and then at Sherpur and Sadipur.

An advance on to Sylhet from Jaintiapur or Karimganj was difficult due to the water obstacles on the approach routes. However, such an advance would give added security to the Indian communications in these areas. An advance from Dharmanagar or Kailashahar areas would be against the grain of the country and involved stiff initial opposition by the Pakistanis. It also entailed moving troops and supplies over a much longer distance. However, it presented the advantage of being able to isolate Sylhet from the rest of the Pakistani forces in this sector by an early capture of Maulvi Bazar and the Sherpur ferry.

The Pakistani 14 Division, which was responsible for the defence of this sector had its headquarters at Ashuganj. It consisted of 202 and 313 Brigades. It also had a substantial number of para-miliary forces. 202 Brigade under Brig. Salimullah had its headquarters at Sylhet and was responsible for guarding the northern and eastern approaches to the town. 313 Brigade under Brig. Iftikar Rana with its headquarters at Maulvi Bazar was responsible for guarding the southern

approaches. The third brigade of this division was deployed in the Akhaura-Brahmanbaria area.

On the Indian side, it was appreciated that the Pakistanis would be guarding the northern and eastern approaches, while the actual concentration was to take place in the South. Improvement of roads, tracks and bridges in the North were undertaken as routine civil maintenance.

Towards the last week of November, there were numerous border skirmishes, especially in the Karimganj area. It was, therefore, decided to eliminate the Pakistani threat to Indian communications along the border, immediately.

The main operations began at the end of the month, when 81 Brigade advanced from Kailashahar towards Shamshernagar. The plan for capture of Shamshernagar entailed the capture of Chattapur tea garden with a battalion and Bagichara tea garden with another. A third battalion was then to launch an attack on Shamshernagar, while a battalion of EBR protected the western flank of the attack. The Pakistanis had prepared strong defensive position in the Chattapur tea garden and difficulty of movement through the thick tea plants gave an added advantage to the defenders. After a resolute stand by the Pakistanis the Chattapur tea garden fell to the Indian troops on 30 November. The same day Bagichara tea garden was secured without opposition. However, an Indian attempt to establish a road-block on the Shamshernagar-Maulvi Bazar road during the night failed. The movement of the Indian Troops was detected by the Pakistanis, who put in a counter-attack preceded by intense shelling, and drove the Indians away.

The attack on Shamshernagar was launched on the night of 1/2 December and, by midday on 2 December, the Pakistanis were cleared out of this area. By last light, the airfield at Shamshernagar was secured, which was repaired and made useable by 4 December.

In the meanwhile, 59 Brigade had commenced operations opposite Kulaura area. On 3 December, Gazipur tea garden was attacked by a battalion, but it met with only partial

success due to stiff opposition by the defenders. After the last light on 4 December, another battalion went in an attack on Gazipur, which was captured by midday on 5 December after bitter fighting.

While operations in Gazipur area were in progress, another battalion was ordered to clear Kapnapahar to the East of Gazipur. By first light on 4 December, a road block was established, which was attacked by the Pakistanis, but without success. Further counter attacks followed during the day, but were repulsed with heavy casualties to the Pakistanis. A day light attack was launched by the Indians on Kanpnapahar from the East and it was captured after a bitter struggle. After the capture of Ghazipur, a battalion quickly advanced towards Kulaura and occupied it before midday on 6 December without opposition as the Pakistanis had vacated the place earlier.

Kulaura was the key to the defence in the Sylhet Sector, by dint of its position as a road link between Dharmanagar to Fenchuganj and Shamshernagar to Latu. Therefore, the fall of Kulaura made it possible for 59 and 81 Brigades to establish physical link with each other. On the Pakistani side things were in a complete disarray, because the battalion which had fought at Ghazipur had been completely disorganised. This annulled the possibility of any substantial resistance to the advancing Indian forces and Fenchuganj axis was left open to them. On 6th December, a battalion of 59 Brigade commenced advancing from Kulaura to Brahman Bazar, and occupied it without opposition.

On the Shamshernagar axis a battalion of 81 Brigade cleared Munshi Bazar on 6 December after heavy fighting. Another battalion then resumed advance to Maulvi Bazar on the night of 6 December and established a firm base on a hillock a few kilometres East of the town. Intensive patrolling was resorted to. The same day, the GOC, 14 Pakistani Division ordered Iftikar Rana to fall back towards Ashuganj to link up with 27 Pakistani Brigade. Intelligence reports from various sources indicated that the Pakistanis were pulling out of the Sylhet Sector and trying to concentrate in the Ashuganj area.

By this time, 57 Mountain Division had captured Akhaura and was advancing towards Ashugnnj. Since a brigade from this division was committed in Maynamati area, the division required immediate building up for a massive drive to Ashuganj. Accordingly Sagat Singh, the Corps Commander, ordered on 6 December, 59 Brigade to move to Kailashahar for operations in the Agartala-Brhmanbaria area, handing over the operational responsibility of Fenchuganj area to the BSF.

Keeping the over all tactical picture in view, Sagat Singh now appreciated correctly that the Pakistanis were withdrawing towards Ashuganj with a view to give a battle at Sylhet. Hower, since Sylhet was denueded of Pakistani troops at this stage, and they were falling back in a most disorganised manner, he decided to take Sylhet before it could be converted into a fortress. Sagat Singh's ingenuity and tactical brilliance became evident, when he decided to heli-lift a battalion and land it in the vicinity of Sylhet without delay. This would endanger Sylhet, precipitate the Pakistani withdrawal to the town for its defence, and also facilitate Brig. Wadke's adhoc force advancing to Sylhet along the Jaintiapur axis. This was to be the first heliborne operation undertaken by the Indian Army against a modern enemy.

The lift started on the evening of 7 December and was completed by last light the next day. Brig. Salimullah hastily organised a force comprised of regulars, scouts and paramilitary forces and endeavoured to hamper the smooth landing of the helicopters and the subsequent Indian build-up. However, the Pakistanis failed to eliminate the bridgehead, and hence decided to impede the linking up of the Indian forces. Rana's brigade continued to make efforts to delay the advance af Indian forces along Maulvi Bazar, and Jaintipur axes.

Wadke's force, due to paucity of engineering resources and stiff Pakistani opposition found it difficult to advance and by 10 December reached some 24 kilometres from Sylhet. 81 Brigade on the other hand, cleared Maulvi Bazar, while 59 Brigade was still at Kailashahar, Realising that Wadke's column or 81 Brigade would be unable to link up with the

isolated heli-lifted batalion at Sylhet, it was now decided to advance 59 Brigade on to Sylhet was Fenchuganj.

The advance started on 10 December with a battalion, which secured the southern bank of the railway brigade at Fenchuganj by first light on 11 December. During the night the battalion attacked the bridge putting the bewildered Pakistanis to flight. The advance was continued to Magla Bazar, halfway between Fenchuganj and Sylhet. on the morning of 12 December. Magla Bazar was captured by first light on 13 December, and the leading elements advanced further towards Sylhet. That morning, they came under intense fire from the bridge area South of Sylhet. On the morning of 14 December, a battalion attack was put in and this Pakistani position was captured. A supplementary road-block behind the Pakistanis fetched a large number of prisoners. Now Sylhet lay just across the river.

In the meanwhile, 81 Brigade had contacted the Pakistani positions at Mauvli Bazar on 7 December. The next day, the Pakistanis were punished with air and artillery bombardment, and a battalion attack to capture Maulvi Bazar was planned in the night. By a quirk of fate, an artillery shell landed on the Pakistani ammunition dump and resulted in an explosion, which shook the town for almost two hours. The Pakistanis withdrew hastily and their positions were occupied by the attacking battalion. The advance was resumed at first light the next day, Sherpur ferry was captured on 10 December and Saidpur ferry the next day. The brigade then pushed forward but was held up at Daadapur, which was cleared by last light on 13 December. On the night of 13/14 December the leading elements of the Brigade captured Sylhet railway station on the South Bank of Surma.

On the Jaintiapur axis Wadke pushed South from Sarighat and contacted Pakistani positions in the Hemu area on 8 December. He then established a road block behind the Pakistanis and attacked the main positions at last light on 10 December and captured it. As Wadke's forces advanced further, they met with continuous and stiff resistance but pushed on doggedly. Eventually on 15 December, they con-

tacted Khadimnagar, defences about three kilometres North-East of Sylhet. The positions fell at first light on 16 December, after a frontal attack was launched, while a roadblock cut off the route of withdrawal of the Pakistani forces.

Thus, by 15 December, Sylhet was surrounded by Indian forces from all sides. In the afternoon of 17 December the Pakistani garrison commender Brig. Salimullah surrendered alongwith two brigadiers, 104 other officers and some 6,500 soldiers.

SECTION III

The Bhairab Bazar Sector

The Operational responsibility of the Akhaura-Bhairab Bazar Sector was invested with 57 Mountain Division commended by Maj. Gen. B. F. Gonsalves. The tasks initially allotted to this division were as follows : In phase 1, to capture Akhaura area, move South to the Gumti river in the Maynamati area, and subsequently prepare to capture Daudkandi ; in phase 2, to capture Daudkandi, while 311 Mountain Brigade of the division contained the Pakistanis in Brahmanbaria area opposite Akhaura ; in Phase 3, the division less 311 Brigade with kilo force was to capture Chittagong. 61 Mountain Brigade was to be under Headquarters 4 Corps for operations during Phase 1. The task allotted to this brigade was to isolate Comilla from the North and West and establish a firm base in Maynamati area for the subsequent operations of 57 Division to capture Daudkandi.

27 Pakistani Infantry Brigade under Brig. Saidullah with headquarters at Brahmanbaria was holding the area opposite the divisional sector of Agartala. Maj. Gen. Kazi Abdul Majid Khan, GOC, 14 Pakistanni Division, was responsible for the Defence of this area. His headquarter was at Ashuganj, and 202 and 313 infantry Brigade of his division were deployed in Sylhet and Maulvi Bazar area respectively. The inter-divisional boundary of 14 and 39 Pakistani Divisions was formed by the Gumti, which ran North of Comilla.

Akhaure which is opposite Agartala and only 3 Kilo-

metres from the border was an important hub of communications in this sector. A railway line joined Akhaura with Dacca after crossing Meghna over Ashuganj Bridge. Akhaura was connected by road with Agartala in the South-East and by a track to Gangasagar and onwards to Agartala via Karnel Bazar by an indifferent track unsuitable for vehicular traffic. The main road from Comilla to Brahmanbaria ran via Kasba and West of Akhaura. The area of Akhaura was criss-crossed by number of nullas and ponds. The Titas limited the approaches to Akhaura from North and South West to narrow defiles.

(Map No. 8)

Brahmanbaria was the other important centre of communications in this sector. It was located on the western bank of the Pagla river and in the narrow loop of the Titas. The main road from Comilla to Ashuganj as well as the railway line from Akhaura to Dacca passed through Brahmanbaria. Being linked with Ajabpur, Charlapur and Gokarna ferries by motorable tracks, Brahmanbaria presented an attractive tactical objective in this sector.

On the Indian side, the Agartala airfield, located only a few hundred metres from the international boundary, enabled the Indian forces to keep the Akhaura defences under close and constant observations. Any presence of Pakistani forces in the Akhaura area posed a serious potential threat to the vital Agartala airfield and town.

The Pakistanis had deployed 27 Infantry Brigade for the defence of this sector as follows : Two battalions plus in Akhaura and Gangasagar, a battalion plus in area South of Gangasagar and two battalions plus in area North of Akhaura. All these positions were further reinforced by para-military forces and Mujahids.

The Pakistanis had developed Akhaura into a formidable fortress by building up well-co-ordinated defences in its North, South and East. The Titas on the western fringe of the town was a major obstacle. It was appreciated by the Pakistanis that the Indian thrust would develop from the North as it would provide early security to Agartala airfield and bring the Indian forces to Singarbil ferry, from where the rear of the

Pakistani defences in Akhaura and Kasba area could be threatened. Therefore, the entire area was converted into a boxlike defensive system by building solid bunkers and supplementing the natural obstacles with artificial ones.

Gonsalves planned to capture Akhaura from the South in three phases by employing 73 and 311 Brigades. 73 Brigade under Brig. Tuli was allotted the task of containing Gangasagar initially, preventing any re-inforcements from that area, by cutting off Kasba-Akhaura track in the North of Kasba. An adhoc task force called the Sierra Force was to dominate the Singarbil jetty and capture Rajapur and simulate an attack on Akhaura in conjunction with the operations from the South. 311 Brigade under Brig. Misra was to capture the area of Lonasar and Noapara in the South of Akhaura. This brigade was also to prevent the movement of Pakistani forces along the Kasba-Brahmanbaria road by establishing road blocks in that area. In phase 2, 73 Brigade was to capture Gangasagar and link up with 311 Brigade in the Noapara area. 311 Brigade was then to exploit northwards towards Akhaura. In phase 3, Akhaura was to be captured by both brigades by attacking from the South. (Map No. 9)

At first light on 1 December, a battalion of 311 Brigade secured the area of Lonasar and Noapara without much opposition. Another battalion of the brigade established a firm base in the general area of Koda. Concurrently, 73 Brigade securred Maniad South of Gangasagar and the Sierra force secrued the area of Singarbil jetty and captured Rajapur.

The next day, a battalion of 73 Brigade advanced along the Agartala-Gangasagar track and captured Karnel Bazar after stiff resistance. Another battalion moved along the Agartala-Akhaura road and secured the area of Broken Bridge a kilometre across the border.

The Pakistanis reacted violently during night 2/3 December forcing Sierra Force to abandon their positions in the Rajapur area. Indian positions in the Gangasagar area were also subjected to grave threat by Pakistani armour and artillery fire. In the morning, the Indian forces captured Gangasagar

and linked up with the troops in Lonasar area. Fierce fighting took place in all areas and Rajapur was recaptured, while a large chunk of ground was lost around Simrail. Gangasagar was counter-attacked by the Pakistanis with air in close support. In the meanwhile, the battalion at Karnel Bazar moved forward to reinforce the troops in Gangasagar area. Similarly, the other battalion from the broken Bridge area moved closer to the town. The stage was now set for the capture of Akhaura.

On 3 December, Gonsalves decided to capture Akhaura with only 311 Brigade and Sierra Force, while 73 Brigade established a roadblock North of Kasba to cut off the Brahmanbaria-Kasba road. But the attack was delayed, because the air support was not made available, though Sierra Force kept continuous pressure from the North throughout 4 December. In the early hours of 4/5 December, Akhaura was subjected to heavy artillery shelling and feint attack was simulated from the North to deceive the Pakistanis as to the actual direction of the attack. The main attack was launched in the early hours of 5 December by a battalion from the South, which captured Simrail after heavy fighting. Another battalion pushed forward in teeth of heavy opposition and by morning, Akhaura, the key to Pakistani defences in this sector was captured. The Pakistani forces at Kasba made no effort to aid their troops in Akhaura which showed their state of morale, which was definitely at low ebb. It was also discovered by the Indian forces that the Pakistanis had converted the railway embankment from Akhaura to Brahmanbaria into a motorable track. This provided a direct access to Dacca from the East over the Meghna with its only bridge at Ashuganj.

On 5 December, 311 Brigade was ordered to exploit towards Brahmanbaria. Sierra force advanced towards the Ajabpur ferry so as to prevent any Pakistani movement from Sylhet towards Dacca. On 6 December 73 Brigade advanced towards Brahamanbaria. The leading troops of this brigade reached the eastern bank of the Pagla by midday on 7 December.

The Pakistanis had strong defences in the narrow loop of the Titas based on Brahmanbaria across the Pagla. How-

ever, Brahmanbnria was only a delaying position and the Pakistanis intended to fight a decisive battle in Bhairab Bazar area along the western bank of the Meghna.

Gonsalves planned to threaten Brahmanbaria and the Ashuganj Bridge from the rear and flank and capture it in intact, while the main thrust developed from the North. At this stage the advance was led by 73 Brigade and 311 Brigade was moving up gradually behind it. The Pakistanis evacuated Brahmanbria. 311 Brigade crossed the river and commenced advancing beyond Brahmanbaria. The aim was to capture the Ashuganj bridge intact without giving a chance to the Pakistani forces to reorganise. However, the damaged bridge at Brahmanbaria required extensive repairs, which resulted in considerable delay in bringing up the artillery and other heavy equipment. So, the advance was carried out without artillery support and the leading elements of the Indian forces pressed to the bridge site by midday on 8 December. It was appreciated that the Pakistani forces were on the run, which gave a sense of overconfidence to the advancing Indian troops. By midday on 9 December the advancing Indian troops neared Ashuganj from the North East keeping the Meghna on their right.

The Pakistanis were concerned about the safe withdrawal of their troops and therefore, deployed strong forces to protect the bridge at Ashuganj. Thus when the exhuberant Indian troops reached in the vicinity of the bridge, they came under intense artillery and mortar fire and were counter-attacked by the Pakistanis under the personal command of Brig. Saidullah. As a result, two Indian battalions fell back with heavy casualties.

At this stage Maj. Gen. Majid Khan panicked fearing a heliborne operation by the Indian troops alongwith the ground attack to capture the bridge. He ordered immediate demolition of the bridge, leaving Saidullah and his troops on the east bank of the river. Saidullah, a brave commander, later crossed the river safely alongwith his troops in local boats. Ashuganj fell without opposition on 10 December and Chandpur and Daudkandi also fell on the same day, which indicated a total collapse of the Pakistani forces in the sector.

Although it was initially appreciated by Sagat Singh that the Pakistani troops from Sylhet and Maulvi Bazar would link up with the garrison of Bhairb Bazar, it now became apparent that the Pakistanis, who were now in a state of disorder and confusion, could not co-ordinate the defences at Bhairab Bazar. He, therefore, decided on a bold course to make a dash to Dacca, the early capture of which would bring about a quick end of the war. He immediately planned to conatin Bhirab Bazar with a minimal force, cross the Meghna in helicopters farther South and advance speedily on to Dacca. Such a manoeuvre would be direct blow at the heart of the Pakistani power. Also taking into consideration the inability of the Pakistani forces to launch a organised counter-attack on the heliborne forces, the operation would not be too risky.

Gonsalves accordingly selected an area for lending a few kilometres North East of Narsingdi and South West of Rajpura. A riverine logistic organisation was arranged for the maintenance of the heli-borne troops. A battalion from 311 Brigade contained Bhairab Bazar from the direction of Ahsuganj, while yet another battalion from 73 Brigade threatend it from the southwest after crossing the river. 73 Brigade crossed the river in boats and concentrated in area Narsingdi, Sierra Force also operated under command of 73 Brigade.

On 9 December a battalion of 311 Brigade was heli-lifted from Brahmanbaria and it secured the area West of Rajpura by evening. Two more battalion were lifted in some 110 sorties over a period of 36 hours. The jetty area of Narsingdi was secured and so was the road and rail crossings over Brahmaputra river West and South-West of the town. By first light on 13 December, the heli-lift was completed successfully.

With the capture of Narsingdi on 12 December the road to Dacca now lay open to the Indian forces. Guns and heavy equipment were moved across the river in local boats and the build-up was completed. Thus Sagat Singh employed the strategy of vertical envelopment in this sector. While, Majid had chosen to confine himself to the static defence of Bhairab Bazar and made no efforts to discrupt the building up of the Indian forces. The stage was set for a breakout towards the heart of East Pakistan.

SECTION 4

The Chandpur Sector

The operational responsibility in the Chandpur Sector was vested in 23 Mountain Division commanded by Maj. Gen. R.D. Hira, MVC. The task allotted to the division was to captuer the southern part of the Lalmai Hills and Laksham, and subsequently Chandpur.

The Chandpur Sector was bounded in the North by the Gumti, the Meghna in the West and the track from Chauddagram to Laksham and the railway from Laksham to Chandpur, in the South. The General area of operation included Comilla in the North. Laksham in the South and the important ferry town of Chandpur in the West.

There were a number of roads to Chandpur from the Indian territory which passed through Comilla. The Chandpur-Chaudgram track passed through Laksham and Lalmai. The Lalmai Hills dominated the northen part of the sector from Maynamati in the North to Lalmai village in the South. An East-West road linked Daudkandi with Comilla via Maynamati. Another road in the North jointed Comilla to Daudkandi. This road was a part of the Dacca-Chittagong highway which ran parallel to the border from Comilla to Feni.

Comilla was an important centre of communications, from where a large number of roads and tracks ran North, West and South. It was linked with Sonamura, in India, by road and with Chittagong, Laksham, Daudkandi and Brahmanbaria in East Pakistan. Comilla also had important airfield and railway station.

Laksham was the other important centre of road and rail communications in the southern part of the sector. It was connected with the Indian border by a motorable track upto Chauddagram. It was also linked with Noakhali and Comilla by road and with Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Chandpur by rail.

There were four important tactical objectives in the sector : Daudkandi, Chandpur, Maynamati and Lalmai. Both Daudkandi and Chandpur were important ports between

Chittagong and Dacca on the Meghna. Maynamati blocked any approach along the main road from Comilla to Daudkandi and overlooked Comilla. Lalmai was an important communications centre with roads from Comilla, Laksham, Chandpur and Barura coverging on to it.

14 Pakistani Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Abdul Majid Khan was responsible for the defence of the whole Eastern Sector. However, after the operations in the Belonia Bulge, the Pakistanis appreciated that the Indian forces would launch a major offensive in the South of Comilla to capture Chandpur. Therefore, they readjusted their defences in the Eastern Sector and reinforced it with 39 Division. This division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan, was given the responsibility of the defence of Comilla in the North to Feni in the south. It comprised of 117 and 53 Brigades, with the inter-brigade boundary running along Chauddagram to Laksham and Chandpur, inclusive to 117 Brigade with headquarters at Maynamati. The inter-divisional boundary between 14 and 39 divisions was along the Gumit river inclusive to 39 Division.

117 Brigade under Brig. Atif was responsible for the defence of the area, including Comilla and Laksham. Atif had deployed two battalions in general area Lalmai Mills, Mynamati and Kashinagar and one battalion along the Chauddagram-Laksham axis. These battalions were reinforced with para-Military forces, 53 Brigade which comprised of two battalions and was commanded by Brig. Aslam Niazi was moved out of Dacca to defend Feni in the middle of November. Another adhoc brigade was placed directly under Pakistan Eastern Command. Although the Pakistanis had well-prepared defences covering the likely routes of ingress, Feni and Lalmai area was more strongly defended as compared to Laksham.

(Map No. 10)

The plan of 4 Corps was based on the strategy of indirect approach avoiding the conventional technique of direct advance and attack. The aim was to avoid the costly struggle in clearing the strong defences of the Lalmai Hills, including the Comilla and Maynamati area.

The Plan entailed containing the Pakistani forces in the

Lalmai and Maynamati area and advance over the tracks between Lalmai and Laksham with two brigades, while one brigade advanced along the Chauddagram-Laksham road. 61 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Pande was also allotted to 23 Division to protect its northern flank, 301 Mountain Brigade under Brig. H.S. Sodhi was ordered to infiltrate along the northern approach, while 83 Mountain Brigade under Brig. B. S. Sandhu was ordered to advance along the Chauddagram-Laksham road and isolate Laksham from the south. 181 Mountain Brigade under Y. C. Bakshi was ordered to follow Sodhi's brigade and advanced to Laksham, isolating it from North and West 83 and 181 Brigades were to capture Laksham, after which Sodhi was to advance and capture Chandpur.

61 Brigade moved from Bisalgarh on night 1/2 December and took Pipulia, thus posing a threat to the Pakistani defences in the Lalmai Hills and Comilla. It then moved northwards on 5 December and later captured Daudkandi and a large number of Pakistani troops withdrawing from Laksham to Daudkandi and Maynamati.

Sodhi's 301 Brigade moved in on 3 December and quickly took Mian Bazar, Kashinagar and a large number of prisoners. This resulted in great confusion among the Pakistanis and created a gaping hole between Laksham and the rest of the brigade at Bhuschi, while Bakshi's 181 Brigade advanced towards Laksham on the night of 4/5 December. It cut the Lalmai-Laksham road in the area of Bhore by first light on 5 December, and then established roadblocks to the north and West of Laksham the same day. After last light on 5 December, Sodhi followed 181 Brigade and surprised the Pakistanis at Mudafarganj securing the bridge there intact by midday on 6 December.

In the meanwhile, 53 Pakistani Brigade fell back to Laksham on the night of 5/6 December after abandoning Feni. The Pakistanis also started pulling their troops in the North into the Maynamati defences. Around this time, a battalion attacked and captured Comilla town. Atif then withdrew his troops from southern portion of Lalmai Hills to concentrate his forces for the defence of Maynamati. This opened the vital route via Lalmai to Chandpur for the use of the advancing Indian forces.

In the meanwhile, Sandhu's 83 Brigade cleared Chuddagram on 5 December after heavy fighting. The Pakistani forces in Chauddagram and Parikot area were trapped by roadblocks behind them and attempted a break out. By first light on 7 December, Sandhu's brigade established blocks South and South east of Laksham. Thus Laksham was invested from all sides by 7 December.

The Pakistanis at this stage were put in a desperate position. They had been invested in the two fortresses of Maynamati in the North and Laksham in the South, while 23 Division was pushing in to Chandpur through the gap in the middle. On 7 December, Rehman ordered Niazi to recapture Mudafarganj. He decided to hold Laksham with a battalion plus and sent two task forces of more than a battalion each to attack Mudafarganj. But the un-coordinated attacks by these columns met with failure both at Mudafarganj and the block on Hajiganj rail track. The column against Mudafarganj was called back, while the other was ordered to stay put and delay the advancing Indian troops. Just as Brig. Sodhi captured Chandpur on 9 December, the second Pakistani columns split near Hajiganj and decided to move towards Chandpur and Comilla in small groups.

In the meanwhile, in Laksham the situation had worsened after the failure of the Pakistanis to break out. Niazi with a few men managed to slip out of the town in small parties on the night of 8/9 December. He later joined the Pakistani forces at Maynamati. A number of Pakistanis fell into the hands of the Indian forces. and their plight indicated that the morale of Pakistani troops holding Laksham was low. Laksham fell by first light on 9 December without resistance.

When 181 Brigade surrounded Laksham from the North, Hira decided not to attack it, but push on to Chandpur without wasting time.

Sodhi commenced the advance from Mudarfarganj at last light on 7 December. Hajiganj was cleared on the morning of 8 December. The speed of the advance was slow. due to the demolitions carried out by the withdrawing Pakistani forces. Despite these problems, the leading troops pushed

to Chandpur and entered it on the morning of 9 December. Chandpur was evacuated hastily by the Pakistanis earlier, but a large number of prisoners were taken.

Rahim Khan had located his headquarters at Chandpur, but in the absence of any reserves was unable to influence the outcome of the battle. He was instructed by Niazi from Dacca to avoid becoming a prisoner. So, he left Chandpur by a gunboat on the night of 8/9 December. Although this boat was hit by the IAF and a number of casualties took place, Rahim Khan reached Dacca shaken but unhurt.

After the capture of Chandpur, Hira received an order to collect all available boats for crossing the Meghna. However, in the absence of boats, such a move was not feasible at this stage. Also, while the operations around laksham were in progress, intelligence reports discernibly indicated that the Pakistanis had vacated the southern part of the Lalmai Hills. This opened the vital communications in the sector to Chandpur via Lalmai. 181 Brigade which was in the North of Laksham occupied the vacated Pakistani positions immediately.

Sagat Singh visited Hira on 12 December and since there were no boats to cross the Meghna, further tasks of 23 Division were discussed 61 and 181 Brigades were to reduce Maynamati defences under command of Hira. Sodhi's brigade was to cross the Meghna to secure Baidya Bazar for operations against Dacca. The crossing of this brigade was to be under 23 Division, but it was to came directly under command of 4 Corps, once it crossed to the West bank of Meghna.

At this stage, 57 Mountain Division had crossed the Meghna and was closing on Dacca, Nagra was also heading for Dacca from the North. Sodhi moved his brigade first to Comilla and then Daudkandi on 13 December. By 14 December, the entire brigade concentrated at Daudkandi.

On the morning of 14 December, one battalion of 301 Brigade crossed the river in steamers and country boats and landed unopposed at Baidya Bazar.

In the meanwhile, Pande was operating in Maynamati area. On 6 December Rajapur was captured by a battalion

attack. The attacking forces exploited towards Burichang, which fell in the afternoon. By first light on 7 December, the whole brigade built up South of the Gumti in the Jaffarganj area. The brigade resumed its advance on 7 December to capture Chandina, which fell the same day.

Visualising the threat to Maynamati, Atif withdrew his troops from Comilla and Lalmai Hills for the defence of Maynamati. This permitted the Indian troops to use main Laksham-Lalmai-Chandpur road, greatly facilitating the operations of 23 Division.

After the capture of Chandina on 7 December, Pande resumed his advance and secured Elliotganj on 8 December. By now the administrative details of 61 Brigade were stretched to its utmost. So, Pande spent 8 December building up his administrative echelons. He resumed the advance at first light on 9 December from Elliotganj and captured Daudkandi before last light after minor resistance. (Map No. 11)

On 10 December, Pande launched a battalion attack on the Mynamati defences from Dighlgaon. Although the entire Mynamati complex could not be captured the attacking battalion secured a firm foothold and repelled consecutive counter-attacks by the Pakistanis. Throughout 11 December this battalion kept looking for a route into Maynamati. After a number of unsuccessful skirmishes Nayeem surrendered to Pande on 12 December.

The same day, Sagat Singh ordered Hira to move 181 Brigade to Maynamati and captured it with 61 and 181 Brigades. The Pakistani positions in Maynamati had two regular battalions reinforced by a para-military and irregular troops. The defences were strongly built and well co-ordinated. The capture of Maynamati at this stage was not very important since the road to Dacca was open and the dash was about to begin. So, Maynamati was punished with heavy artillery and aerial bombardment and an attack was planned for 16 December. However, that morning Atif and Niazi surrendered with some 5,000 troops to Pande.

After the capture of Laksham 83 Brigade joined kilo

force and began operating in Kumira area. The Pakistanis were supposed to be holding this area with two battalions under Brig. Taskin-ud-din. The Pakistanis offered stiff resistance in this area by 15 December the Indian forces reached Sitakund. Then the surrender was announced and the victorious Indian troops entered Chittagong on 17 December.

While these operations were in progress, Army Headquarters learnt that small parties of Pakistanis were withdrawing towards Cox's Bazar in order to escape into Burma. Therefore, an amphibious operation, was planned with an ad hoc force of a brigade - strength under Brig. S.S. Rai. INS Vikrant was to provide the air support. The task force took to the sea in merchant ship Vishwa Vijay on 13 December and was transferred to LSTs on the 13/14 night. Unfavourable tidal conditions and depth of the water made it difficult for the force to get ashore. Eventually, on 17 December it was ferried to the shore in country boats. They were no Pakistani in this area and the war was over, so the force was taken to Chittagang in local transport.

Thus ended the operations in the Eastern Sector and began the race to Dacca. (Sketch No. 12)

CHAPTER IX

The Fall of Dacca

"The Indian Forces have reached all around you. Your air force is destroyed. You have no hope of any help from them. Chittagong, Chalna and Meghna ports are blocked. No body can reach you from the sea. Your fate is sealed. The Mukti Bahini and the people are all prepared to take revenge for the atrocities and cruelties you have committed."

"Why waste lives ? Do you want to go home and be with your children ? Do not lose time, there is no disgrace in laying down your arms to a soldier. We will give you the treatment befitting a soldier."

—GEN. (later Field Marshal) S.F.H.J. MANEKSHAW, MC

(A message addressed to Officers and Men of the Pakistani Army after the fall of Jessore)

"To conquer is nothing, one must profit from one's success."

—NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

The Pakistani Forces in East Pakistan were in a state of complete disorder by 9 December. 9 Pakistani Division had been split in three parts and was fighting isolated battles around Khulna and Kushtia, while Jhenida had already fallen. Maj. Gen. Ansari was anxiously awaiting further developments at Faridpur with a weak ad hoc force. 16 Pakistani division had been cut into two and the divisional commander, being separated from his headquarters, had lost control over his division. 14 Division had blown up the bridge at Ashuganj leaving an entire brigade on the East bank of Meghna and was stuck at Bhairab Bazar. The ad hoc 39 Division

under Maj. Gen. Rehman had ceased to exist as a fighting formation. The Indian forces had gained a decisive strategic advantage by creating wide gaps in the Pakistani defences for the advance to Dacca. On 8 December arrangements were made to air-lift all foreigners from Dacca and the gloom of defeat pervaded the city. The same day Gen. Manekshaw, broadcast a special message to the Pakistani forces to surrender, telling them that their condition was hopeless.

On 9 December, Governor Malik and Gen. Niazi sent messages to Yahya Khan for political settlement and immediate ceasefire. These proposals leaked out and were soon broadcast by many foreign radio stations, which further lowered the morale of the Pakistani forces.

On 10 December, appreciating the danger to Dacca, Maj. Gen, Jamshed, who was responsible for its defence, made a serious effort to organise his forces for the last stand. He collected about 1000 regular troops belonging to almost all arms and services and about 3500 policemen, Razakars and other irregulars. However, the Pakistanis had made no plans for the defence of Dacca, in the belief that their strategy of 'theatre fortresses' would stem the tide of advance of the Indian Army. The divisional and brigade commanders too had not catered, for such a contingency and were not confident of a successful fighting withdrawal to Dacca for its defence. 93 Brigade under Brig. Kadir did make an effort to fall back to Dacca, but disintegrated in the process. The Pakistani High Command attempted to boost the morale of the troops by painting colourful pictures of Chinese and American intervention. But as no signs of such aid became apparent the morale suffered a further setback. A spirit of despondency possessed the higher commanders in Dacca and all hopes were given up.

In the meanwhile, in the Eastern Sector, Sagat Singh had been trying to build-up his forces around Narsingdi on the West bank of Meghna. In the Northern Sector, the Indian forces were concentrating around Tangail for a drive on to Dacca. On 13 December, the leading elements of 57 Division were fired upon by the Pakistani forces in Damra area, approxi-

mately 9 kilometers from Dacca, Gensalves had made contact with the Pakistanis across the Lakhya river, the last obstacle East of Dacca. He approached the Lakhya on a broad front and chose to advance from Narasingdi to Demra with 311 Brigade and to Tungi with 73 Brigade. Gonsalves spent 13 December waiting for his armour to cross the Meghna to support his forces advancing towards Dacca.

Around this time, it was learnt that a task force of the U.S. Seventh Fleet consisting of the nuclear-powered "Enterprise" and other vessels had entered the Bay of Bengal adding colour and excitement to the overall Picture.

On 14 December, the Indian forces occupied area between the Lakhya and the Balu rivers. Sierra Force crossed the Lakhya, secured the Rupganj area and advanced South to threaten the Pakistani positions in the Demra area. In the meanwhile, the leading elements of 73 Brigade advance from Gorasal towards Tungi and secured Pubail after a brief skirmish. By the night of 14 December the armour of 57 Division reached the Demra area after having negotiated the Meghna successfully. Also 311 Brigade advanced from Baidya Bazar and proceeded to link up with 57 Division in the Demra area.

On 16 September, the Mukti Bahini found a suitable crossing place at Lakshman Khola, about five Kilometres North-East of Narayanganj. It was also reported earlier that the Pakistanis were holding defences around Bandar on the East bank of Lakhya opposite Narayanganj. This position was attacked by last light on 15 December and secured by first light on 16 December. A battalion moved from Kuripara and reached Lakshman Khola at midnight on 15/16 December. Since there were no local boats available, the crossing had to be postponed till the next night.

A very striking incident having far reaching effect occurred on 14 December. The Government House in Dacca, where Governor Malik was holding an emergency meeting, was hit by the IAF. Immediately after the strike, a shaken Malik resigned his post and moved with members of his cabinet and senior civil servants to the Hotel International which was converted into a neutral zone by the International Red Cross. Thus 14 December saw the last of the East Pakistan Government. Later that evening Dacca was shelled by 57 Division.

Yahya sent a telegram to Niazi on 14 December to take necessary steps to stop fighting and preserve the lives of the armed forces personnel. Niazi immediately contacted the US Counsul General in Dacca, who sent the Pakistani proposal for a cease fire to Washington. From there it was relayed to Delhi on 15th Dec. after consulting the Pakistani Government.

On 15 December, the ring around Dacca began to tighten. In the Northern Sector, Nagra revised his plans after a series of unsuccessful attempts to cross the Turang at Kasimpur. He ordered Kler and Irani to continue operations along the Turang and instructed Santa Singh to push South to the Mirpur Bridge. Early on 15 December, some troops crossed the Turang in local boats on the flanks of the Pakistanis in the Kasimpur area. The Pakistanis withdrew from Kasimpur blowing up the bridge and a bridge head was thus secured on the eastern bank of the Turang by the Indian forces. Meanwhile, troops from Kaliakar were moving forward using all means of transportation. Santa Singh a leading battalion secured the road junction East of Dhamrai ferry in the evening of 15 December, after a minor skirmish. It then pressed on towards Sabhar, which fell by last light.

At this stage, Nagra was placed under the command of 4 Corps, so that operations around Dacca could be properly co-ordinated. However, the arrangement proved to be ineffective due to lack of proper signal facilities and instructions. Kler's brigade was halted in Chandna area due to stiff opposition, so Nagra decided to launch 167 Brigade to threaten the Pakistani forces there. Irani established a roadblock by first light on 16 December, with his brigade in the South of Chandna. Intense artillery fire was exchanged between Chandna and the roadblock area which later continued beyond the ceasefire. The build-up around Dacca continued, but the actual advance was inhibited due to a variety of factors such as inability of armour to cross the rivers, lack of co-ordination and signal communications and paucity of intelligence regarding roads and tracks in the vicinity of Dacca as also Pakistani dispositions around the city.

The Indian forces maintained continuous pressure on the Lakhya side on 16 December. The battalion which had reached

Lakshman Khola after first light on that day crossed the river since the Pakistani forces had pulled out from Narayanganj in the South of the crossing site. In the early hours of 16 December, Gonsalves had more or less perfected the arrangements for an ottack on Dacca.

In the Northern Sector, as Santa Singh's leading troops approached Sabhar, he learnt that the Pakistani forces had withdrawn from this area and the route to Dacca lay open to the advancing Indian forces. Brig. Bashir who was responible for the defence of Dacca, after a frantic effort raised a composite ad hoc force and occupied the Mirpur Bridge area to deny this approach to the Indians on the midnight of 15/16 December. Santa Singh decided to advance immediately after securing Sabhar to capture the Mirpur Bridge. The advance commenced on the night of 15 December from Sabhar and in the early hours of 16 December the leading elements hit the bridge at Mirpur.

Early that morning Nagra learnt of the messages sent by Niazi to Islamabad seeking permission for ceasefire. Rumours of the end of hostilities were prevalent in both the armies throughout 15 and the morning of 16 December. Therefore, Nagra proceeded to the positions of his forward troops and attempted to pursuade the Pakistani forces to surrender. Nagra's message which was sent to Niazi's headquarters through Bashir read :

My dear Abdullah,

I am here. The game is up. I suggest you give yourself up to me and I will look after.

GANDHARV

On the orders of Niazi, Jamshed met Nagra near the bridge and both commanders discussed the details of the surrender. Islamabad had instructed Dacca at midnight on 15/16 December to surrender to the advancing Indian troops. Accordingly, ceasefire was enforced in Dacca by 11 a.m., but Niazi's headquarters had lost touch with the Pakistani forces in all sectors. As a result, the instructions to surrender were delayed and the fighting continued till 4 p.m. Around 11 a.m. Nagra,

Kler and Santa Singh drove to Niazi's headquarter, where the hapless General broke down saying : "The bastards in Pindi got us into a mess."

By this time elements of Gonsalves and Nagra's leading troops had entered Dacca. At 1 p.m. Maj. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, Aurora's Chief of Staff, arrived in a helicopter to settle the final terms of surrender with Niazi. The military campaign for the liberation of Bangladesh had been completed successfully and the battle of diplomats was about to begin.

News of the surrender ceremony had spread throuhout Dacca and long lines of exhuberant Bengalis rushed to the Rama Race Course from all directions to witness it. Arrangements were made by the Indian forces at the airport, the race course and throughout the city to ensure the safety of the Pakistani forces and that no disturbances took place at the ceremony. In the afternoon, Lt. Gen. Aurora, Air Marshall Dewan, Vice Admiral Krishnan, Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh and all the divisional commanders arrived in Dacca in a group of helicopters. Col. Osmani had sent Group Captain Khondakar to represent the Bangladesh forces. Aurora and his entourage was received at the airport by Niazi. Amid shouts and slogans of the excited inhabitants of Dacca, Aurora and Niazi drove to the race course for the surrender ceremony. The surrender was signed towards the evening on 16 September, in full view of over a million Bengalis. As a symbol of surrender a humble Niazi took out his revolver and handed it to Aurora.

The text of the instrument of surrender ran as follows :—

The PAKISTAN Eastern Command agreed to surrender PAKISTAN Armed Forces in BANGLADESH to Lieutenent-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA, General Officer Commanding in Chief of the Indian and BANGLADESH forces in the Eastern Theatre. This surrender includes all Pakistan land, air and Naval forces, as also all para-military forces and civil armed forces. These forces will lay down their arms and surrender at the place where they are currently located to the nearest regular troops under the command of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

The PAKISTAN Eastern Command shall come under the order of Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA as soon as this instrument has been signed. Disobedience of orders will be regarded as a breach of the surrender terms and will be dealt with in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of war. The decision of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA will be final, should any doubt arise as to the meaning or interpretation of the surrender terms.

Lieutenant-General Aurora gives a solemn assurance that personnel who surrender shall be treated with dignity and respect that soldiers are entitled to in accordance with the provisions of Geneva convention and guarantees the safety and well-being of all Pakistani military and para-military forces who surrender. Protection will be provided to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and personnel of West Pakistan origin by the force under the command of Lieutenant-General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

(JAGJIT SINGH AURORA)
Lieutenant-General,
General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
Indian and BANGLADESH Forces in the Eastern Theatre.

16 December 1971

(AMIR ABDULLAH KHAN NIAZI)
Lieutenant-General,
Martial Law Administrator Zone B and Commander, Eastern Command (PAK.)

16 December 1971

In the view of the impending danger of vengeance by the Mukti Bahini the Pakistani armed forces were not disarmed immediately. In all, about 90,000 regular and para-military troops and others, including civilians, surreenderd in places. Some 22,0000 surrendered to 33 Corps, 2300 to 101 Communication Zone Area, 6700 to Corps and almost 45,000 to 4 Corps. A large number of tanks, guns, weapons, ammunition, supplies, FOL and vehicles were captured. The prisoners were kept in camps guarded by Indian troops for security and administrative reasons. In consultation with the Bangladesh Govern- it was decided to move the prisoners to India. Niazi, Rao Farman Ali, the military adviser to Governor Malik, Commo-

dore Shariff and Air Commodore Inam Ul Haq were flown out of Calcutta in 20 December and by 15 December, the rest of the prisoners of war were moved out to India by various types of transport.

The Indian troops withdrew from Bangladesh in March 1972.

The unconditioned surrender of Pakistani forces in Dacca and the liberation of Bangladesh formed a new landmark not only in the history of the Indian sub-continent but that of the world. The victory of Indian forces in the East was complete. Although India had generally adopted a defensive posture in the West, the Indian forces managed to capture above 5000 square miles of territory there. After the victory in Bangladesh some hawks in India were keen to crush the military might of Pakistan in the West as well, but Mrs. Gandhi decided with a fine sense of diplomacy to declare a unilateral ceasefire immediately after the surrender in Dacca. Mrs. Gandhi visited Dacca on 19 March and signed Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Peace with Mujjb, who had been released by Islamabad.

The lightening campaign resulted in what D.R. Mankekar, an eminent Indian writer aptly titled his book—"Pakistan Cut to Size.' It also eventuated a new era of political instability and internal strife in Pakistan. Yahya resigned and Bhutto took over as the new President of the dismembered country.

The Indian Army's grand victory in Bangladesh was truly 'spectacular' and has been described by Sunday Telegraph as follows :—

"India won above all because of a sense of vision, a carefully defined and maintained sense of purpose, with which the leadership, at times inspired, of Mrs. Indira Gandhi had imbued her nation."

CHAPTER X

The Other Components

SECTION ONE—THE AIR WAR

"This is the third round and we owe it to posterity that we destroy the evil war machine which has consistently disturbed peace in the Indian sub-continent. It will be your privilege to hit the enemy where it hurts him most. The fury and courage of our air-crew, the efficiency and endurance of our ground-crew, and the unflinching faith of each officer, airman and civilian in the final victory of our great country, is to be the nightmare of our enemies."

AIR MARSHALL M.M. ENGINEER
AOC-in-C, Western Air Command
(In his order of the day on 3/4 December 1971)

The Indo-Pakistan War was essentially an all arms war, which exhibited a very high degree of inter-services co-operation. The success in the military operations emanated from two main reasons : firstly, the government gave the armed forces a clear-cut aim ; and secondly the chiefs of staff of the three Services—General Manekshaw, Air Chief Marshall Lal and Admiral Nanda – worked in perfect unison, from the very beginning of the crisis to its successful conclusion.

In the present day warfare, the role of the air arm is two-fold-strategic and tactical. The strategic role entails long range tasks conforming to the overall political aim and as such has no immediate bearing on the success or failure of opeations. Some of the examples of such tasks are the strategic bombing of ememy industries, ports, communication hubs and similar targets, and above all defending own country

against enemy air forces by gaining general and local air superiority. The tactical role, on the other hand, involves tasks such as interdiction and close support of land and naval forces, and influences the immediate outcome of operations.

The IAF's task in the 1971 war was four-fold : firstly to provide effective air defence to its own country ; secondly to carry the air war into the enemy territory with a view to crippling his war machine ; thirdly to provide close air support to the Army fighting on the ground ; and fourthly, to provide maritime reconnaissance services to the Navy.

The Pakistani Air Force, in 1971 was a substantial arm with modern aircraft and equipment acquired from the United States, France and China. The Pakistanis, at the very beginning of the shooting war, made a desperate but ill-conceived effort on the pattern of the Isralis to cripple the Indian air power. On the dusk of 3 December 1971, they made a pre-emptive strike on most important air fields on the western border. But the IAF intelligence system, based on radar air surveillance equipment and observer posts gave adequate warning of the approaching Pakistani aircraft. As a result, unlike 1965, none of the air bases was caught off guard. The IAF aircraft were well-dispersed and protected by concrete pens, and therefore the PAF strike met with complete failure, since not even a single IAF machine was damaged on ground. Also the PAF strike was not carried out in depth or strength and hence proved to be ineffective.

Later that night the IAF went into action with remarkable swiftness and ferocity. The counter-strike was so effective that within 24 hours the back of the PAF was broken and thereafter it could not exert any influence on the conduct of the war. It was estimated that 333 PAF machines were destroyed on the night of 3/4 December alone. During the next four days the PAF lost 39 more planes and another 22 by the end of the conflagration. Thus one third of the PAF aircraft out of its total of 290 were knocked off during the entire war, while the IAF lost 157 aircraft.

The PAF carried out a total of 80 sorties in the Western Theatre and 60 in the East. The IAF, excelled by chalking

down a total of 7,000 sorties during the 14-day war at the rate of 500 per day, the largest effort since the Second World War. It was indeed a commendable feat on the part of the IAF.

In the eastern theatre, the IAF's primary role was close air support, which entailed reducing the military and natural obstacles in the way to accelerate the pace of the land forces driven to Dacca. On the night of 3/4 December, Dacca's two main jet airfields of Tejgaon and Kurmitola were attacked by the IAF bombers. A number of attacks were carried out on the other important air fields in the province as well. Such was the impact of the strikes that within the first 48 hours of the war the PAF was swept off the skies of East Bengal. Thereafter, the IAF resorted to support the land forces and attack military targets such as gunboats and other craft carrying military personnel and hardware on the water courses. It also ensured freedom of movement for the Eastern Fleet vessels around the coast.

The IAF greatly assisted the ground forces by ferrying them across major water obstacles, which were difficult to negotiate, thereby maintaining the speed of advance. It air-lifted nearly 4,000 troops with supporting arms and equipment across the rivers at Narsingdi, Baidya Bazar, Raipur and Sylhet. These heli-lifting operations imported a new dimension to the mobility of infantry—the Queen of the Battlefield.

The IAF also dropped the paratroopers, for the first time in the history of Indian armed forces on 11 December, near Tangail, some 90 kilometres from Dacca. For this operation about 50 Dakotas, Packets and AN-125 were employed. The drop was carried out with precision, except in a few odd cases, and the troops were kept supplied on the subsequent days first by para-drops and eventually by air-craft by making use of improvided airstrip.

The IAF also carried out reconnaisance missions for the Navy, which operated in the Bay of Bengal.

The Indian pilots combat conduct surpassed all previous achievements, while the Pakistani pilots were reluctant to take on their Indian counterparts in aerial combat. This tendency

went to prove the time honoured dictum—"It's always the man behind the machine !"

Air Chief Marshall P.C. Lal, while addressing the IAF personnnel on conclusion of the war remarked : "I do not like war myself. But it is our duty to be ready to protect our country against any mis-adventure by the enemy. We have gained valuable experience in the 14-day war which we shall use to our advantage if necessary." He then added with characteristic foresight—"We have to keep alert and be ready to ensure our seeurity."

SECTION TWO—THE WAR AT SEA

"As the survivors swam away from the sinking ship, some of them looked back and saw the ship going down and the sea closing over the bridge. And they saw Captain Mulla seated in the chair of the Captain on the bridge, as the ship went down. Keeping company with him was Lieutenant-Commander Joginder Krishen Suri, Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla, 45 in the highest tradition of the Navy, preferred to stand by his 11 officers and 176 sailors who went down with the Khukri".

—D.R. MANKEKAR

On the sinking of INS Khukri in his book "Pakistan Cut to Size"

The military collapse of Pakistan both in East and West was brought about much sooner than expected by the Indian Navy. The IN performance in the war denonstrated that the Navy must ensure the security of a maritime country as also hasten its victory in war. The IN, prior to the 1971 War, was often been decided as a 'white elephant' and 'sick widow'. But its contribution to the overall war effort was of such high magnitude that it dispelled all doubts regarding its capabilities.

The IN comprised of two naval commands, Western Naval Command at Bombay and Eastern Naval Command at Vishakhapatnam. The task given by Admiral Nanda, the Chief of Naval Staff, to the Fleet werc : firstly, to destroy Pakistan's Naval forces, secondly to capture or destroy Pakisran's Naval vessels; thirdly, to ensure the safety of Indian merchant ships at

sea and the Naval control of all shipping, fourthly, to safeguard against the threat of Naval bombardment, sabotage and clandestine attacks, fifthly, to effect the centraband control; and lastly to isolate Bangladesh and the port of Karachi.

A task of the Western Fleet steamed right into Karachi on 4 December in teeth of the powerful Pakistani Naval defences. In the battle that followed—it was the largest Navel battle after the Seeond World War—it sank Pakistani destroyers Khaiber and Shah Jehan, besides the two mine-sweepers Tughril and Tippu Sultan. The PAF proved to be impotent to intervene in the battle, due to the offensive action by the IAF. The task force also bombarded Karachi harbour. blew up the port installations and oil tanks, and then returned home without any loss or damage to itself. A second raid on Karachi was carried on 8 Decem,ber and met with tremendous success. A unit of this task force also captured the Pakistani merchant vessel, the Madhumati, which was carrying cotton to Japan.

The only losses the Western Fleet suffered were the INS Khukri which sank on 9 December, and one shore-based Alize aircraft.

In the eastern waters, INS Vikrant, IN's only aircraft carrier, led out the task force comprising the destroyer Rajput, two frigates Brahmaputra and Beas and two Petya antisubmarine patrol boats. On 4 December, the sea-hawk aircraft launched the first strike off the carrier on Cox's Bazar. The second strike was made on Chittagong in the afternoon the same day. Meanwhile, a companion ship screening Vikrant detected and destroyed a submarine of the Daphne class, Military targets all along the coast of Bangladesh were raided by the carrier based Alize aircraft. The Vikrant cruised up and down throughout the war bombarding important military targets and ports such as Khulna, Chalna, Mangla, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

On the night of 3 December, INS Rajput sank the submarine Ghazni, the pride of Pakistani Navy, off Vishakapatnam. The submarine had steamed out of Karachi in mid November with the aim of locating and destroying INS Vikrant.

The Eastern Fleet also captured two Pakistani merchant vessels Anwar Baksh and Baqir, two tugs and a half dozen other ships, under false names and colours, flying Liberian, Panamanian, American, British or Japanese flags. In addition, it seized eight other ships under charter to Pakistani Government.

The blockade of the East Bengal ports was so effective that Pakistani troops fleeing South found themselves trapped. Around 16 to 20 Pakistani gun boats hugged the shore, not daring to venture out to the sea, and were rounded up later.

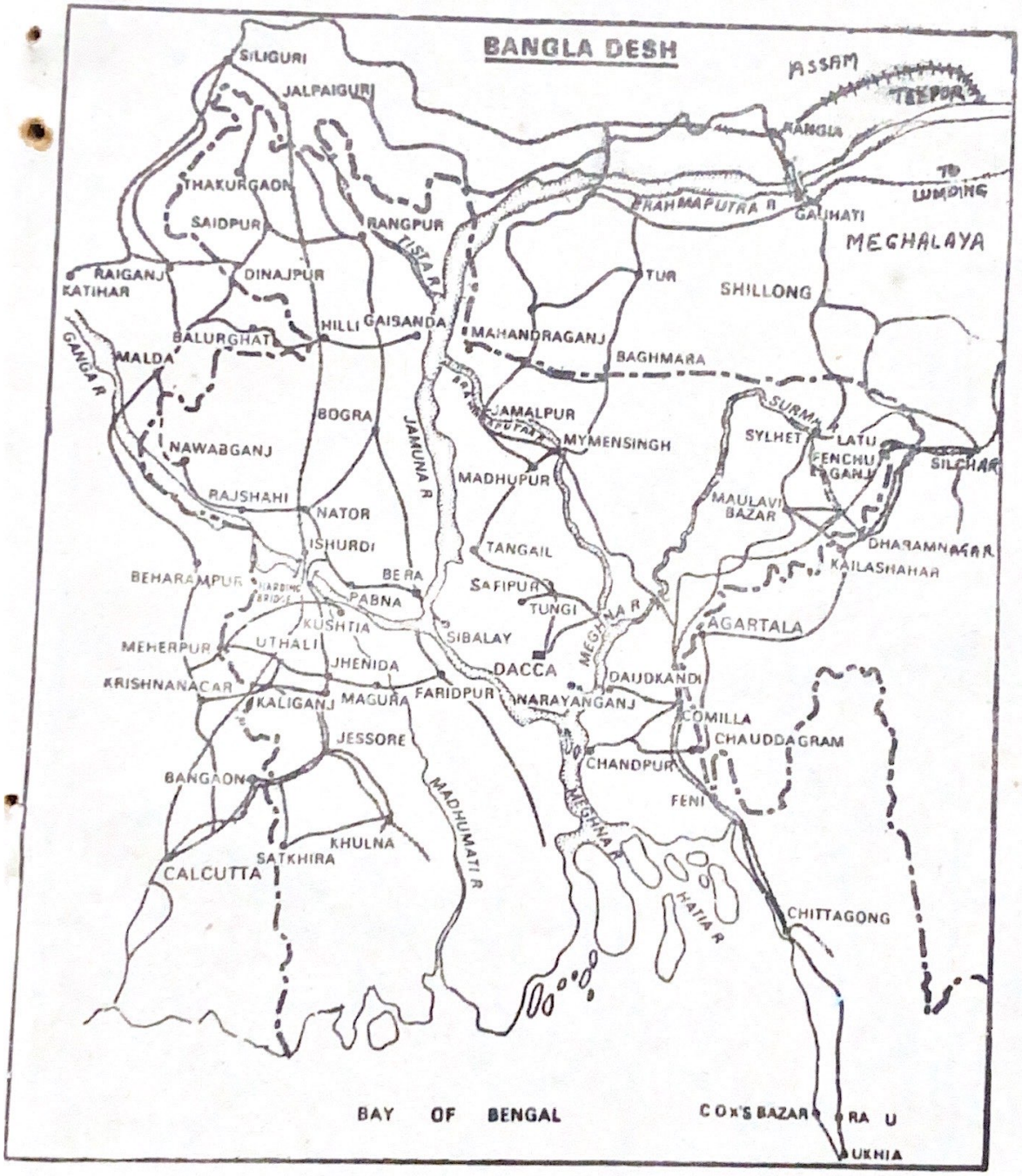
The IN sank 22 Pakistani vessels in all. It also apprehended 24 ships suspected of carrying contraband. Three vessels were detailed in Calcutta and Bombay ports, while 17 were examined and released.

Harbour security was yet another task performed by the Navy effectively. It lay at three levels : local, the sea approaches and the high seas.

After the 1971 War India emerged as a major power in the entire region from the Suez to the Straits of Malacca.

Thus the Indian Navy contributed to a great achievement by the Armed Forces of Free India which paralleled the battle of Blenheim, described by the famous poet Southly thus —'It was a famous Victory,'

THE END


BANGLA DESH
SILIGURI
JALPAIGURI
ASSAM
TEZPUR
RANGIA
TO LUMDING
THAKURGAON
SAIDPUR
RANGPUR
TISTA R
BRAHMAPUTRA R
GAUHATI
MEGHALAYA
RAIGANJ
KATIHAR
DINAJPUR
TUR
SHILLONG
HILLI
GAIBANDA
MAHANDRAGANJ
BALURGHAT
MALDA
GANGA R
BAGHMARA
SURMA R
BOGRA
JAMUNA R
JAMALPUR
MYMENSINGH
SYLHET
LATU
FENCHUGANJ
SILCHAR
NAWABGANJ
MADHUPUR
RAJSHAHI
NATOR
MAULAVI BAZAR
ISHURDI
TANGAIL
DHARAMNAGAR
KAILASHAHAR
BEHARAMPUR
HARDINGE BRIDGE
BERA
SAFIPUR
PABNA
TUNGI
MEGHNA R
AGARTALA
KUSHTIA
SIBALAY
MEHERPUR
UTHALI
DACCA
DAUDKANDI
JHENIDA
KRISHNANAGAR
KALIGANJ
MAGURA
FARIDPUR
NARAYANGANJ
COMILLA
JESSORE
CHAUDDAGRAM
CHANDPUR
BANGAON
FENI
MADHUMATI R
MEGHNA R
KHULNA
SATKHIRA
CALCUTTA
HATIA R
CHITTAGONG
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COX'S BAZAR
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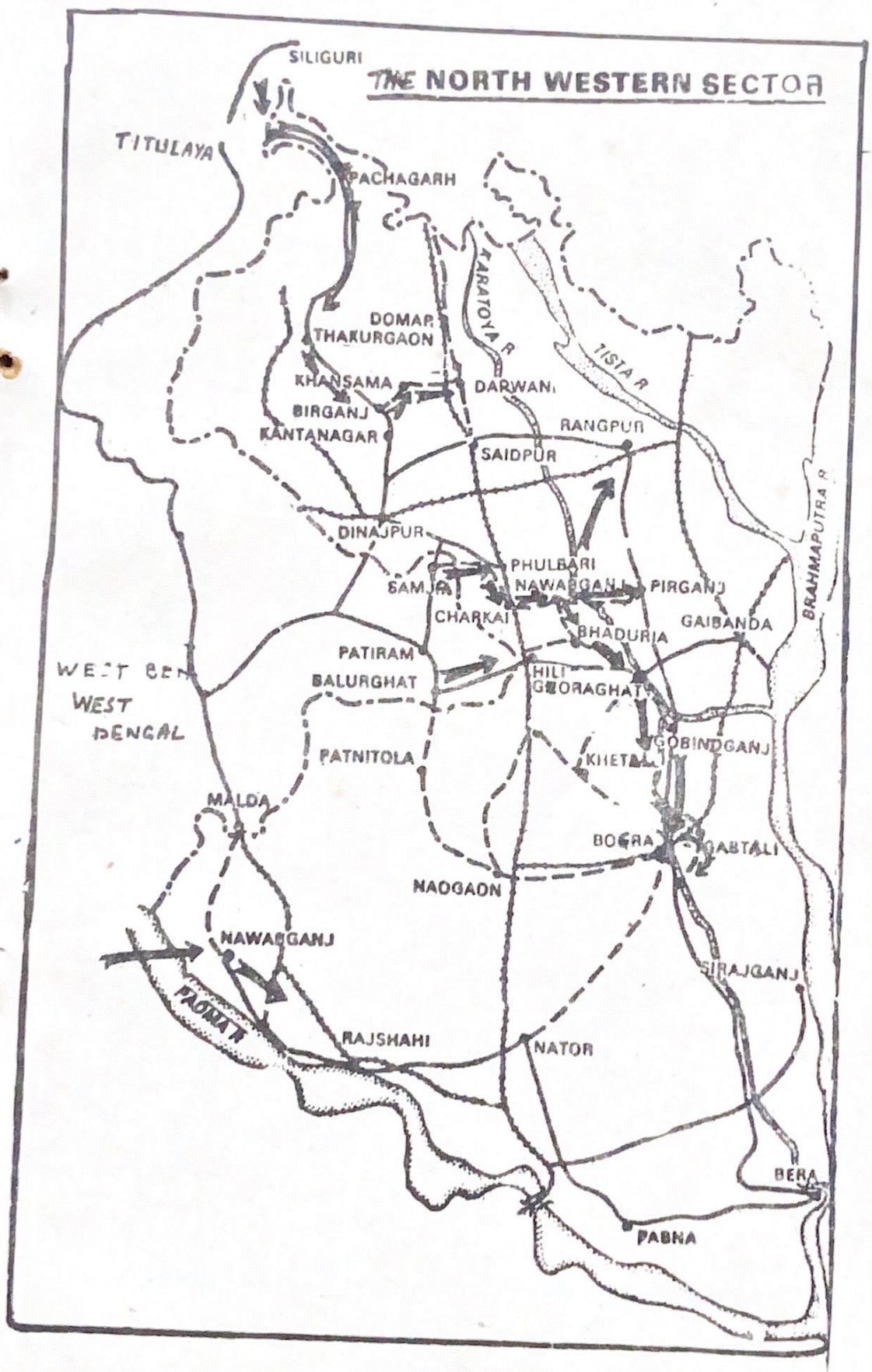
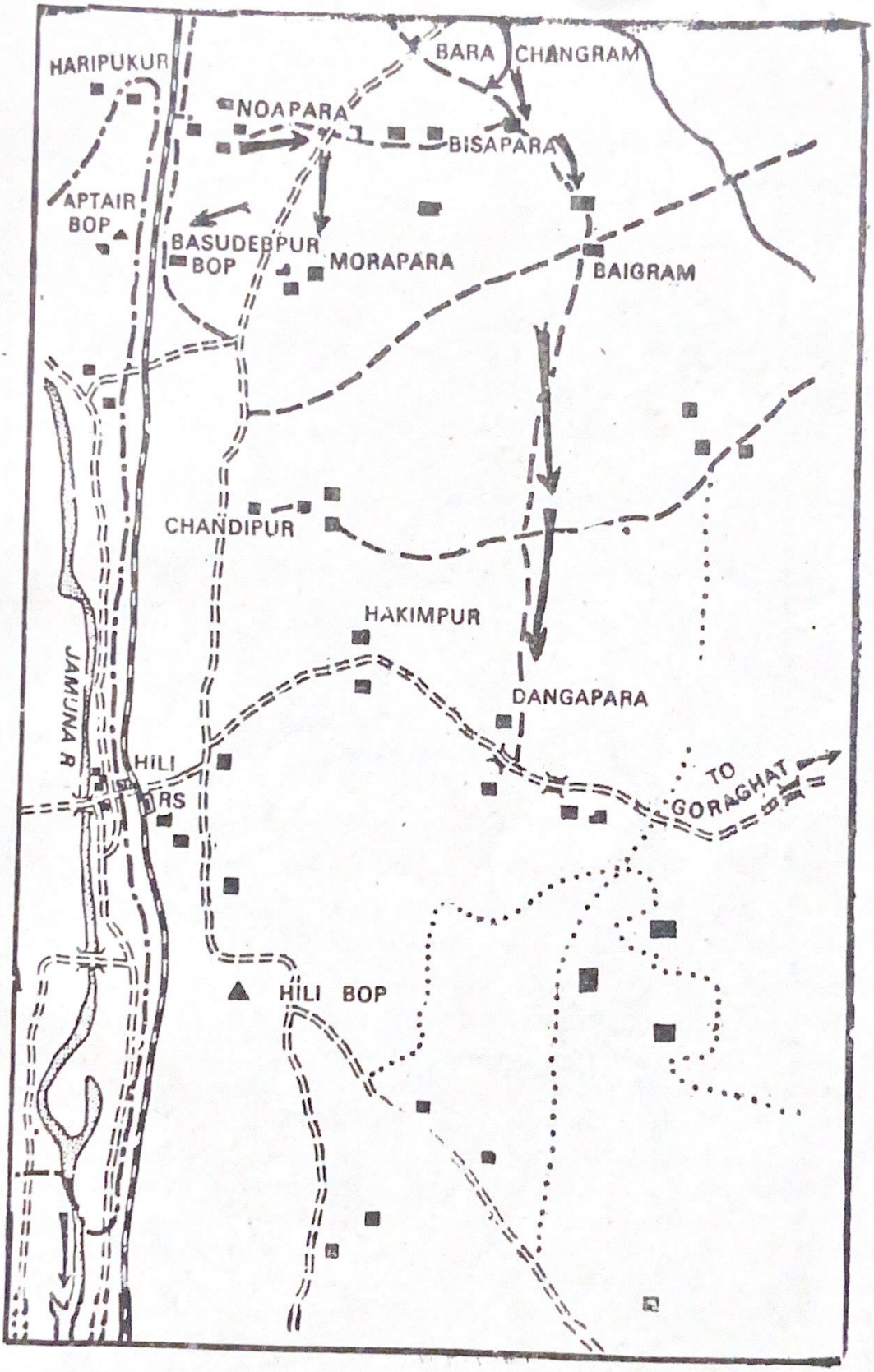
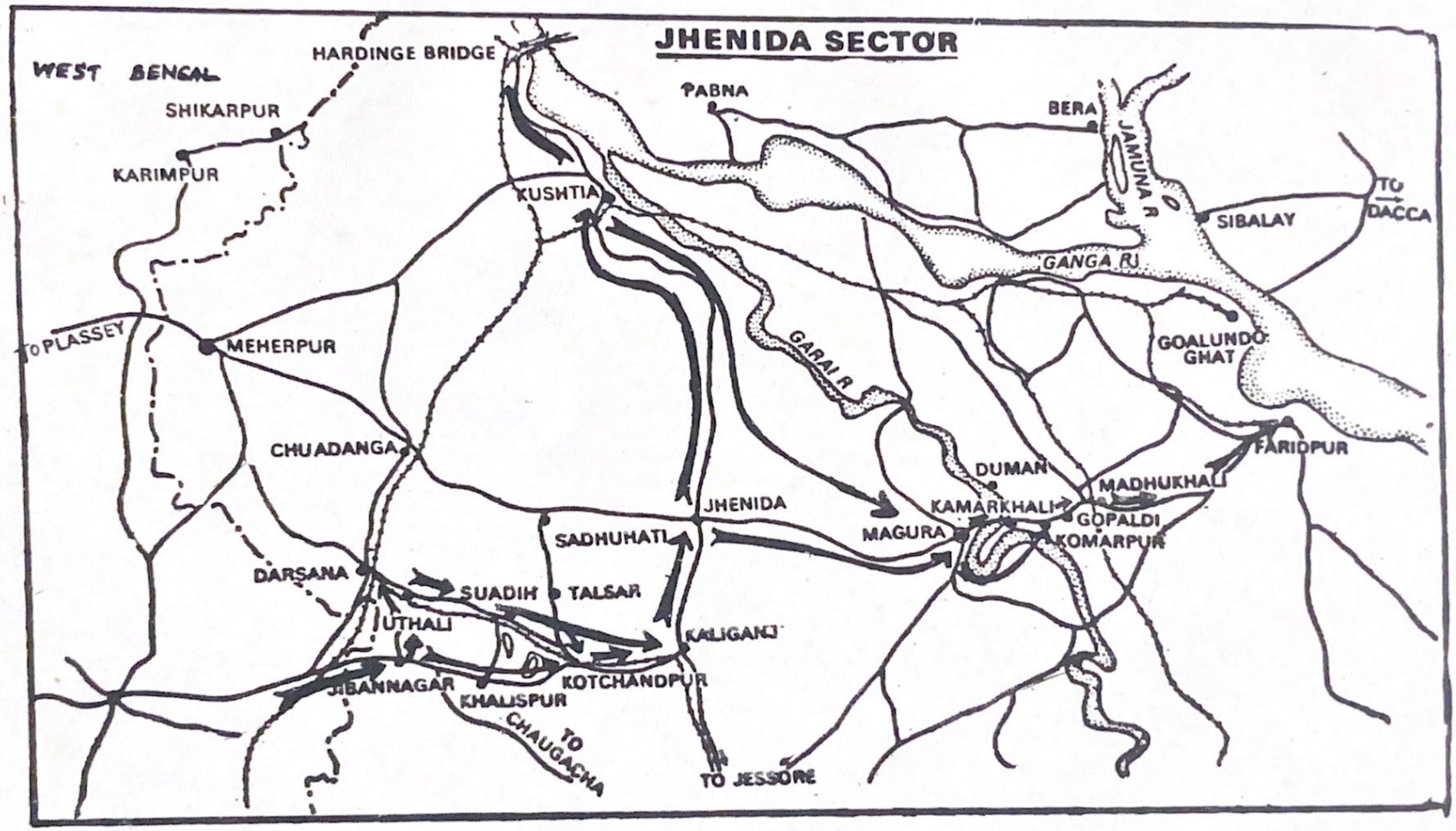
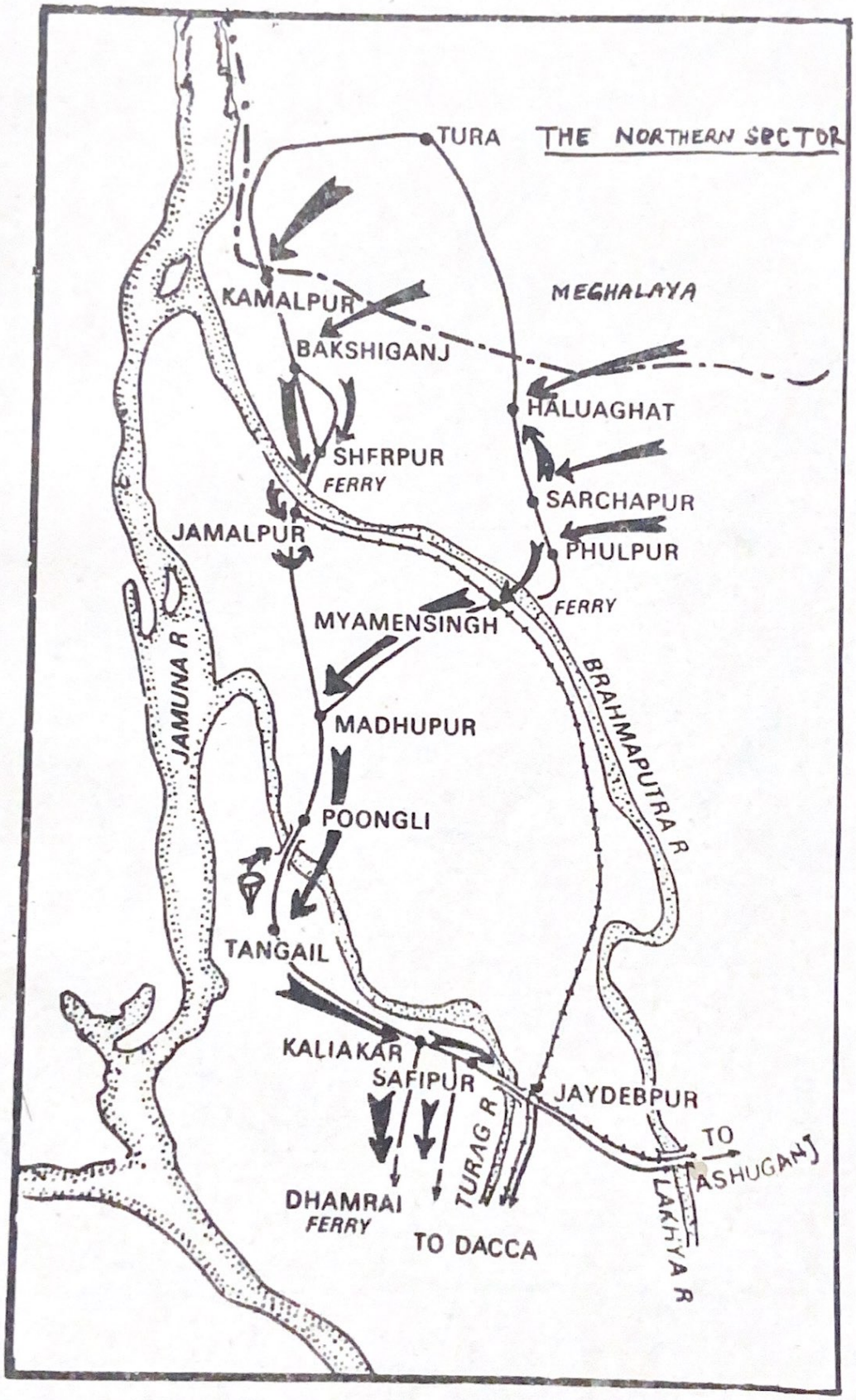
UKHIA


THE NORTH WESTERN SECTOR
SILIGURI
TITULAYA
PACHAGARH
DOMAR
THAKURGAON
KHANSAMA
BIRGANJ
KANTANAGAR
DARWANI
KARATOYA R
TISTA R
RANGPUR
SAIDPUR
DINAJPUR
BRAHMAPUTRA R
PHULBARI
SAMJA
NAWABGANJ
PIRGANJ
CHARKAI
BHADURIA
GAIBANDA
PATIRAM
BALURGHAT
HILI
GEORAGHAT
WEST BEN
WEST
BENGAL
PATNITOLA
KHETA
GOBINDGANJ
MALDA
BOGRA
GABTALI
NAOGAON
NAWABGANJ
PADMA R
SIRAJGANJ
RAJSHAHI
NATOR
BERA
PABNA


HARIPUKUR
BARA CHANGRAM
NOAPARA
BISAPARA
APTAIR BOP
BASUDEBPUR BOP
MORAPARA
BAIGRAM
CHANDIPUR
HAKIMPUR
DANGAPARA
JAMUNA R
HILI
RS
TO GORAGHAT
HILI BOP


JHENIDA SECTOR
WEST BENGAL
HARDINGE BRIDGE
SHIKARPUR
KARIMPUR
PABNA
BERA
JAMUNA R
TO DACCA
SIBALAY
KUSHTIA
GANGA RJ
GARAI R
TO PLASSEY
MEHERPUR
GOALUNDO GHAT
CHUADANGA
FARIDPUR
DUMAN
MADHUKHALI
JHENIDA
KAMARKHALI
GOPALDI
KOMARPUR
MAGURA
SADHUHATI
DARSANA
SUADIH
TALSAR
UTHALI
KALIGANJ
JIBANNAGAR
KOTCHANDPUR
KHALISPUR
TO CHAUGACHA
TO JESSORE


THE NORTHERN SECTOR
TURA
KAMALPUR
MEGHALAYA
BAKSHIGANJ
HALUAGHAT
SHERPUR
FERRY
SARCHAPUR
JAMALPUR
PHULPUR
FERRY
MYAMENSINGH
JAMUNA R
BRAHMAPUTRA R
MADHUPUR
POONGLI
TANGAIL
KALIAKAR
SAFIPUR
JAYDEBPUR
TO
ASHUGANJ
TURAG R
DHAMRAI
FERRY
TO DACCA
LAKHYA R